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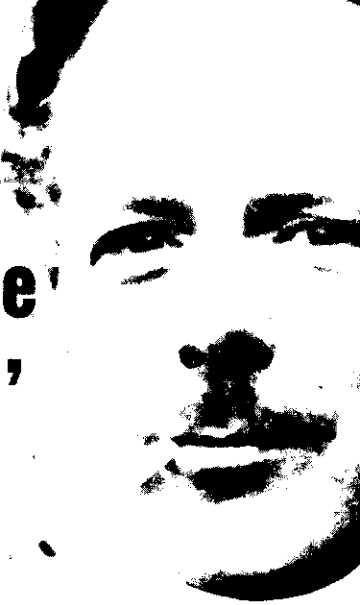

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

CRIME STORIES

The Best of Everything	*Stanley Ellin*	3
How Jacques Spent His Wedding Night	*Henry Norton*	69
Dark Interlude	*Jane McClure*	126
The Portrait	*Aldous Huxley*	134

DETECTIVE STORIES

The Y-Shaped Scar	*Rufus King*	17
The Green Weed	*Margaret Page Hood*	30
Death Had a Voice	*Charles B. Child*	54
Death on the Riviera	*Q. Patrick*	65
And Turn the Hour	*Peter Godfrey*	98

BEDTIME STORY

In the Dark	*Edith Nesbit*	43

SERIAL STORY

Tom Sawyer, Detective: part two	*Mark Twain*	81

THRILLER

The Human Leopards	*L. J. Beeston*	111

WESTERN DETECTIVE STORY

Hard Case	*Robert Arthur*	121

BOOK REVIEWS

Detective Directory	*Robert P. Mills*	52

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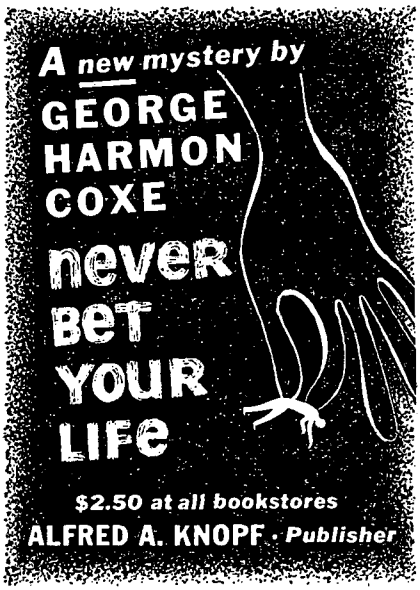

IVOR BROWN

associate editor of the London Observer on detective story reading

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New York Times Book Review, February 18, 1951

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on detective story reading

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"The Best of Everything" is Stanley Ellin's new short story. It won a Second Prize in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest. Actually, all we should have to tell you, by way of editorial comment, is that Stanley Ellin is the author of "The Specialty of the House," "The Cat's-Paw," "Death on Christmas Eve," "The Orderly World of Mr. Appleby," and "Fool's Mate." From those earlier stories you should know what to expect: a first-rate tale, compounded of perceptive observation, imaginative detail, and that sense of horror which lurks not only in the "specialties" of life but equally, perhaps even more shockingly, in the "orderly world" about us.

Yes, perhaps we should stop right here. Yet it occurs to us that Stanley Ellin has now been appearing in EQMM for four years, and that during all that time we have told you little about him, about the man who has written such superlative crime stories. Here, then, is a 'tec tintype of one of the most promising talents in the detective field today:

EDUCATION: *B.A. and boilermaker's apprentice. Prior to the acceptance of his first novel, steelwork was Stanley Ellin's vocation and writing his avocation; since that first novel was published, writing has become his vocation and steelwork his avocation.*

SELF-PORTRAIT: *"A figure of average height and disproportionate girth, he reveals a striking resemblance to an Alaskan brown bear who has been preparing himself for a hard winter. Seen close up, he gives the curiously unfinished appearance of an Epstein sculpture. These impressions are belied only by a pair of liquid brown eyes, and a pair of extremely sensitive hands capable of cutting to the ace of spades on demand."*

HOBBIES: *"Counting my chickens before they're hatched."*

RECREATIONS: *Watching baseball, football, boxing, ballet; hearing opera, Judy Holliday, conversation . . .*

THE BEST OF EVERYTHING

by STANLEY ELLIN

IN ARTHUR'S EYES THEY WERE ALL seemingly cut from one pattern. They were uniformly tall and well-built. They had regular features set into nicely tanned faces and capped by crew cuts. Their clothing was expensively staid; their manners were impeccable. They came from impressive Families and impressive Schools, and they regarded these things casu-

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ally. Among the bees that swarmed through the midtown hive, through Gothic piles redolent with the pleasant scent of gilt-edged securities, through glass pinnacles like futuristic fish bowls, they were not the most obtrusive, yet they were not lost.

To their jobs they brought the qualifications of Family and School and the capacity for looking politely eager when a superior addressed them. Actually, they were as casual about their jobs as they were about everything else, because they were cushioned with money. And for all this Arthur hated them, and would have sold his soul to be one of them.

Physically he might have passed muster. He was a tall, extremely good-looking young man — when he walked by, few women could resist giving him that quick little sidelong glance which means they are interested, even if unavailable — and he had a sober poise which was largely the product of shrewd observation and good self-control. But he came from no impressive Family, no impressive School — and he had no money outside of his moderate salary. His parents were dead (their legacy had barely paid their funeral expenses), he had left high school before graduation to go to work, and uneasily shifted jobs until he had recently come to port in Horton & Son, and he could, at any moment he was asked, have stated his net worth to the penny: the total of bank account, wallet, and change pocket. Obviously, he could not afford to be casual, as a fine young man should.

That phrase, *fine young man*, crystallized his hatred of the type. He had been standing outside Mr. Horton's door one morning when the two sons of a client had been ushered out. Their eyes flicked over Arthur in the fraction of a second, instantly marked that he was not one of them, and turned blankly indifferent. Nothing was said, nothing done, but he was put neatly in his place in that moment and left to stand there with the hate and anger boiling in him. And he couldn't hit back, that was the worst of it; there was no way of touching them. Their homes, their clubs, their lives were inaccessible.

When the elevator door closed behind them Mr. Horton seemed to notice Arthur for the first time. "Fine young men," he observed, almost wistfully, gesturing toward the elevator door, and the phrase had been planted. Not only planted, but fertilized on the spot by Mr. Horton's tone which, to Arthur's inflamed mind, appeared to add: *They belong to my world, but you do not.*

And to make it worse, of course, there was Ann. Ann Horton.

It is the traditional right of every enterprising young man to apply himself as diligently to romance as to business, and to combine the highest degree of success in both by marrying the boss's daughter. And if the daughter happened to be as beautiful and desirable, and, to use the admiring expression of those who knew her, unspoiled as Ann Horton, so much the better.

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But what Arthur knew instinctively was that there are different degrees of being unspoiled. Thus, if a girl who desperately yearns for a forty-foot cabin cruiser and finally settles for a twenty-foot speedboat is unspoiled, Ann Horton was unspoiled. It is not quite sufficient to approach someone like this bringing only a burning passion and an eagerness to slay dragons. It is also necessary to come riding in golden armor, mounted on a blooded horse, and bearing orchestra seats to the best musical comedy in town. And, if the suitor is to make his point explicit, not on rare occasions, but frequently.

All this and more Arthur brooded over as he lay on his bed in Mrs. Marsh's rooming house night after night, and studied the ceiling. His thoughts were maddening, whirling around on themselves like the apocryphal snake seizing its own tail and then devouring itself. Ann Horton had looked at him more than once the way all women looked at him. If he could only meet her, offer her the image of himself that she required, was marriage out of the question? But to meet her on her terms took money, and, ironically, the only chance he ever had of getting money was to marry her! Good Lord, he thought, if he ever could do that he'd have enough money to throw into the face of every fine young man he'd ever hated.

So the thoughts slowly reshaped themselves, and without his quite knowing it Ann Horton became the means, not the end. The end would be the glory that comes to those who, without counting their money, can afford the best of everything. *The best of everything*, Arthur would say dreamily to himself, and his eyes would see beautiful, expensive pictures like clouds moving across the ceiling.

Charlie Prince was a young man who obviously had known the best of everything. He made his entrance into Arthur's life one lunch hour as Arthur sat finishing his coffee, his eyes on a Horton & Son prospectus spread on the table before him, his thoughts on a twenty-foot speedboat with Ann Horton.

"Hope you don't mind my asking," said Charlie Prince, "but do you work for old Horton?"

The voice was the voice of someone from a Family and a School; even the use of the word "old" was a natural part of it, since the word was now in vogue among *them*, and could be applied to anything, no matter what its age might be. Arthur looked up from shoes, to suit, to shirt, to necktie, to hat, his mind mechanically tabbing them *Oliver Moore*, *Brooks*, *Sulka*, *Bronzini*, *Cavanaugh*, and then stopped short at the face. True, it was tanned, marked by regular features, and capped by the inevitable crew haircut, but there was something else about it. Some small lines about the eyes, some twist of the lips . . .

"That's right," Arthur said warily, "I work for Horton's."

"Is it all right if I sit down here? My name's Charlie Prince."

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It turned out that Charlie Prince had seen the prospectus on the table, had once worked for Horton's himself, and couldn't resist stopping to ask how the old place was coming along.

"Well enough, I suppose," said Arthur, and then remarked, "I don't remember seeing you around."

"Oh, that was before your time, I suppose, and I'm sure the office is hardly encouraged to talk about me. You see, I'm sort of a blot on its escutcheon. I left under rather a cloud, if you get what I mean."

"Oh," said Arthur, and felt a quick, bitter envy for anyone who could afford to be incompetent, insubordinate even, and could leave a firm like Horton's so casually.

Charlie Prince, it appeared, read his thoughts quite accurately. "No," he said, "it doesn't have anything to do with my not being able to hold down the job, if that's what you're thinking. It was a bit of dishonesty, really. Some checks I forged — stuff like that."

Arthur's jaw dropped.

"I know," observed Charlie Prince cheerfully. "You figure that when someone gets caught in a business like that he ought to be all tears and remorse, all sackcloth and ashes, and such. But I'm not. Oh, of course, I was all remorse at getting caught by that idiot, meddling accountant, but you can hardly blame me for that."

"But why did you do it?"

Charlie Prince frowned. "I don't look like one of those silly psychopaths who just steals to get a thrill from it, do I? It was for money, of course. It's always for money."

"Always?"

"Oh, I worked in other places besides Horton's, and I was always leaving under a cloud. Matter of fact, it wasn't until I was in Horton's that I learned the biggest lesson of my life." He leaned forward and tapped his forefinger on the table significantly. "That business of tracing someone's signature is the bunk. Absolute bunk. If you're going to forge a name you just have to practise writing it freehand, and keep on practising until you can set it down slapdash, like that. It's the only way."

"But you got caught there, too."

"That was carelessness. I was cashing the checks, but I didn't bother to make entries about them in the books. And you know what an accountant can be if his books don't balance."

Arthur found himself fascinated, but also found himself unable to frame the question he wanted to ask and yet remain within the bounds of politeness. "Then what happened? Did they — did you . . . ?"

"You mean, arrested, sent to jail, stuff like that?" Charlie Prince looked at Arthur pityingly. "Of course not. You know how those companies are about publicity like that, and when my father made the money good that's all there was to it."

"And nothing at all happened to you?" Arthur said, awestruck.

"Well," Charlie Prince admitted, "something *had* to happen, of course,

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especially after that last performance when my father boiled up like an old steam kettle about it. But it wasn't too bad, really. It was just that I became a sort of local remittance man."

"A what?" said Arthur blankly.

"A sort of local remittance man. You know how those old families in England would ship their black-sheep offspring off to Australia or somewhere just to keep them off the scene, then send them an allowance and tell them it would show up regularly as long as sonnie stayed out of sight? Well, that's what happened to me. At first the old man was just going to heave me out into the cold and darkness without even a penny, but the women in my family have soft hearts, and he was convinced otherwise. I would get a monthly allowance — about half of what I needed to live on, as it turned out — but for the rest of my life I had to steer clear of my family and its whole circle. And I can tell you, it's a mighty big circle."

"Then you're not supposed to be in New York, are you?"

"I said I was a local remittance man. Meaning, I can be anywhere I please as long as I am not heard or seen by any of my family or its three million acquaintances. In which case I merely drop a note to the family lawyer stating my address, and on the first of each month I receive my allowance."

"Well," said Arthur, "considering everything, I'd say your father was being very decent about it."

Charlie Prince sighed. "Truth to tell, he's not a bad old sort at all. But he's cursed by a morbid yearning toward a certain kind of holy young prig which I am not. You know what I mean. The sort of young squirt who's all bland exterior, bland interior, and not a spark anywhere. If I had turned out like that, everything would have been just dandy. But I didn't. So here I am, a veritable Ishmael, two weeks before allowance comes due, locked out of his hotel room . . ."

Arthur felt an inexplicable stirring of excitement. "Locked out?"

"That's what happens when you can't pay your rent. It's a law or a code or something. Anyhow, it's damn thoughtless whatever it is, and what I'm leading up to is, in return for the story of my life, such as it is, you might see your way clear to making a loan. Not too small a one either; a sort of medium-sized loan. I'll guarantee to pay you back the first of the month and with fair interest." Charlie Prince's voice now had an openly pleading note. "I'll admit that I have my dishonest side, but I've never welshed on a debt in my whole life. Matter of fact," he explained, "the only reason I got myself into trouble was because I was so anxious to pay my debts."

Arthur looked at Charlie Prince's perfect clothes; he saw Charlie Prince's easy poise; he heard Charlie Prince's well-modulated voice sounding pleasantly in his ears, and the stirring of excitement suddenly took meaning.

"Look," he said, "where do you live now?"

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"Nowhere, of course, not as long as I'm locked out. But I'll meet you here the first of the month on the minute. I can swear you don't have to worry about getting the money back. The way I've been talking about things ought to prove I'm on the dead level with you."

"I don't mean that," said Arthur. "I mean, would you want to share a room with me? If I lent you enough money to clear up your hotel bill and get your things out of there, would you move in with me? I've got a nice room; it's in an old house but very well kept. Mrs. Marsh — that is, the landlady — is the talky kind and very fussy about things, but you can see she's the sort to keep a place nice. And it's very cheap; it would save you a lot of money."

He stopped short then with the realization that this was turning into a vehement sales talk, and that Charlie Prince was regarding him quizzically.

"What is it?" said Charlie Prince. "Are you broke, too?"

"No, it has nothing to do with money. I have the money to lend you, don't I?"

"Then why the fever to share the room? Especially with me, that is."

Arthur took his courage in both hands. "All right, I'll tell you. You have something I want."

Charlie Prince blinked. "I do?"

"Listen to me," Arthur said. "I never had any of the things you had, and it shows. Somehow, it shows. I know it does, because you wouldn't ever talk to any of those young men, the sort your father likes, the way you talk to me. But I don't care about that. What I care about is finding out exactly what makes you like that, what makes them all like that. It's some kind of polish that a good family and money can rub on you so that it never comes off. And that's what I want."

Charlie Prince looked at him wonderingly. "And you think that if we share a room some of this mysterious polish, this whatever-it-is, will rub off on you?"

"You let me worry about that," said Arthur. He drew out his checkbook and a pen, and laid them on the table before him. "Well?" he said.

Charlie Prince studied the checkbook thoughtfully. "I'll admit I haven't any idea of what I'm selling," he said, "but it's a sale."

As it turned out, they made excellent roommates. There is no greater compatability than that between a good talker and a good listener, and since Charlie Prince liked nothing better than to pump amiably from a bottomless well of anecdote and reminiscence, and Arthur made an almost feverishly interested audience, life in the second-floor front at Mrs. Marsh's rooming house was idyllic.

There were some very small flies in the ointment, of course. At times, Charlie Prince might have had cause to reflect that he had found *too* good a listener in Arthur, considering Arthur's insatiable appetite for detail. It can be quite disconcerting for a

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raconteur embarked on the story of a yachting experience to find that he must describe the dimensions of the yacht, its structure, its method of operation, and then enter into a lecture on the comparative merits of various small boats, before he can get to the point of the story itself. Or to draw full value from the narrative of an intriguing little episode concerning a young woman met in a certain restaurant, when one is also required to add footnotes on the subjects of what to say to a *maître d'hôtel*, how to order, how to tip, how to dress for every occasion, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

It might also have distressed Charlie Prince, who had commendable powers of observation, to note that Arthur was becoming subtly cast in his own image. The inflection of voice, the choice of words and their usage, the manner of sitting, walking, standing, the gestures of hands, the very shades of expression which Arthur came to adopt, all had the rather uncomfortable quality of showing Charlie Prince to himself in a living mirror.

For Arthur's part the one thing that really shocked him in his relationship was the discovery of the childishness of Charlie Prince and his small world. From all he could gather, Arthur decided sombrely Charlie Prince and his like emerged from childhood into adolescence, and stopped short there. Physically, they might grow still larger and more impressive; but mentally and emotionally, they were all they would ever be. They would learn adult catchwords and mannerisms, but underneath? Of course, it was nothing that Arthur ever chose to mention aloud.

His feeling on the subject was heightened by the matter of Charlie Prince's allowance. On the first of each month Mrs. Marsh would smilingly enter the room bearing an envelope addressed to Charlie Prince. It was an expensive-looking envelope, and if one held it up to the light reflectively, as Charlie Prince always did before opening it, it was possible to make out the outlines of an expensive-looking slip of paper. A check for five hundred dollars signed by James Llewellyn. "The family's personal lawyer," Charlie Prince had once explained, and added with some bitterness, "It wasn't hard enough having one father like mine, so old Llewellyn's been playing second father since I was a kid."

To Charlie Prince the amount was a pittance. To Arthur it was the Key. The Key to the enchanted garden just outside Arthur's reach; the Key to Bluebeard's chamber which you were forbidden to use; the Key to Ann Horton. It would not pay for what you wanted, but it would open the door.

Even more tantalizing to Arthur was the fact that for a few hours each month it was all his. Charlie Prince would endorse it, and then Arthur would obligingly stop in at the bank where he had his own small account and cash it there. On his return he would carefully deduct the amount

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of Charlie Prince's share of the rent, the amount that Charlie Prince had borrowed from him the last week or two of the preceding month, and then turn the rest over to his roommate. It was at Charlie Prince's insistence that he did this. "If you want to make sure that I'm square with my rent and whatever I owe you," he had explained, "this is the best way. Besides, you can cash it easily, and I seem to have a lot of trouble that way."

Thus, for a few hours each month Arthur was another man. Charlie Prince was generous about lending his wardrobe, and Arthur made it a point on check-cashing day especially to wear one of those wondrously cut and textured suits which looked as if it had been tailored for him. And in the breast pocket of that suit was a wallet containing five hundred dollars in crisp new bills. It was no wonder that it happened to be one of those days on which he made the impression he had dreamed of making.

He entered his employer's office, and Ann Horton was seated on a corner of the desk there, talking to her father. She glanced at Arthur as he stood there, and then stopped short in what she was saying to look him up and down with open admiration.

"Well," she said to her father, "I've seen this young man here and there in the office several times. Don't you think it's about time you had the manners to introduce us?"

Her manner of address startled Arthur who had somehow always visualized Mr. Horton as a forbidding figure poised on a mountaintop fingering a thunderbolt. But it was even more startling when Mr. Horton, after what seemed to be a moment of uncertain recognition, made the introduction in terms that sounded like music to Arthur's ears. Arthur, he said warmly, was a fine young man. It would be a pleasure to introduce him.

That was Arthur's golden opportunity — and he flubbed it. Flubbed it miserably. What he said was pointless; the way he said it made it sound even more mawkish and clumsy than seemed possible. And even while he was watching the glow fade from Ann Horton's face he knew what the trouble was, and cursed himself and the whole world for it.

The money wasn't *his*, that was the thing. If it were he could be seeing her that evening, and the next, and the one after that. But it wasn't. It was a meaningless bulge in his wallet that could take him this far, and no farther. And that knowledge made everything else meaningless: the clothes, the manner, everything he had made himself into. Without the money it was all nonsense. With it . . .

With it! He had been looking merely ill at ease; now he looked physically ill under the impact of the thought that struck him. An instant concern showed in Ann Horton's lovely eyes. Apparently she was a girl with strong maternal instinct.

"You're not well," she said.

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The idea, the glorious realization, was a flame roaring through him now. He rose from it like a phoenix.

"No, I don't feel very well," he answered, and could hardly recognize his own voice as he spoke, "but it's nothing serious. Really, it isn't."

"Well, you ought to go home right now," she said firmly. "I have the car downstairs, and it won't be any trouble at all . . ."

Arthur mentally struck himself on the forehead with his fist. He had thrown away one opportunity; did he have to throw this one away as well? Yet, Mrs. Marsh's rooming house had never appeared as wretched as it did just then; it was impossible to have her drive him there.

Inspiration put the words into his mouth, the proper words to impress father and daughter. "There's so much work to be done," said Arthur, wistfully courageous, "that I can't possibly leave it." And then he added with as much ease as if he had practised the lines for hours. "But I do want to see you again. Do you think if I called tomorrow evening . . . ?"

After that, he told himself grimly whenever the fire inside him threatened to flicker uncertainly, he had no choice. And Charlie Prince, of course, was not even offered a choice. At exactly seven minutes before midnight, after considerable choked protest and thrashing around, Charlie Prince lay dead on his bed. Entirely dead, although Arthur's fingers remained clasped around his throat for another long minute just to make sure.

It has been remarked that the man with the likeliest chance of getting away with murder is the man who faces his victim in a crowd, fires a bullet into him, and then walks off — which is a way of saying that it is the devious and overly ingenious method of murder that will hang the murderer. To that extent Arthur had committed his murder wisely, although not out of any wisdom.

The fact is that from the moment he had left Ann Horton to the moment he finally released his fingers from Charlie Prince's throat he had lived in a sort of blind fever of knowing what had to be done without a thought of how it was to be done. And when at last he stood looking down at the body before him, with the full horror of what had happened bursting in his mind, he was at a complete loss. The soul had departed, no question about that. But the body remained, and what in the Lord's name was one to do with it?

He could bundle it into the closet, get it out of sight at least, but what would be the point of that? Mrs. Marsh came in every morning to make up the room and empty the wastebaskets. Since there was no lock on the closet door there was no way of keeping her out of it.

Or take Charlie Prince's trunk standing there in the corner. He could deposit the body in it, and ship it somewhere. Ship it where? He put his mind to the question desperately, but was finally forced to the conclusion that there was no place in the

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world to which you could ship a trunk with a body in it, and rest assured that murder wouldn't out.

But he was on the right track with that trunk, and when the solution came at last, he recognized it instantly and eagerly. The storage room in Mrs. Marsh's was a dank cavern in the depths of the house, barred by a heavy door, which, though never locked, made it a desolate and chilly place no matter what the season. Since there was no traffic in that room, a body could moulder there for years without anyone being the wiser. Eventually, it could be disposed of with no difficulty; the object now was to get it into the trunk and down to the storage room.

To Arthur's annoyance he discovered that even though the trunk was a large one it made a tight fit, and it was a messy business getting everything arranged neatly. But at last he had it bolted tightly, and out into the hallway. It was when he was midway down the stairs that the accident happened. He felt the trunk slipping down his back, gave it a violent heave to right it, and the next instant saw it go sliding over his head to crash down the rest of the distance to the floor with a thunder that shook the house. He was after it in an instant, saw that it remained firmly bolted, and then realized that he was standing eye to eye with Mrs. Marsh.

She was poised there like a frightened apparition, clad in a white flannel nightgown that fell to her ankles, her fingers to her lips, her eyes wide.

"Dear me," she said, "dear me, you should be more careful!"

Arthur flung himself in front of the trunk as if she had vision that could penetrate its walls. "I'm sorry," he stammered; "I'm terribly sorry. I didn't mean to make any noise, but somehow it slipped . . ."

She shook her head with gentle severity. "You might have scratched the walls. Or hurt yourself."

"No," he assured her hastily, "there's no damage done. None."

She peered around him at the trunk. "Why, that's that nice Mr. Prince's trunk, isn't it? Wherever can you be taking it at this hour?"

Arthur felt the perspiration start on his forehead. "Nowhere," he said hoarsely, and then when she knit her brows in wonder at this he quickly added, "That is, to the storage room. You see, Charlie — Mr. Prince — was supposed to give me a hand with it, but when he didn't show up I decided to try it myself."

"But it must be so heavy."

Her warmly sympathetic tone served nicely to steady his nerves. His thoughts started to move now with the smooth precision of the second hand on a good watch.

"I suppose it is," he said, and laughed deprecatingly, "but it seemed better to do it myself than keep waiting for Mr. Prince to help. He's very unreliable, you know. Just takes off when he wants to, and you never know how long he'll be gone."

"I think it's a shame," said Mrs. Marsh firmly.

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"No, no, he's a bit eccentric, that's all. But really very nice when you get to know him." Arthur took a grip on the trunk. "I'll get it down the rest of the way easily enough," he said.

A thought struck Mrs. Marsh. "Oh, dear me," she chirped, "perhaps everything did happen for the best. I mean, your making a noise and bringing me out and all. You see, there's a lock on the storage room now, and you'd never have got in. I'll just slip on a robe and take care of that."

She went ahead of him down the creaking cellar steps, and waited in the storage room until he trundled the trunk into it. A dim light burned there, and, as he had remembered, dust lay thick over everything in sight. Mrs. Marsh shook her head over it.

"It's dreadful," she said, "but there's really no point in trying to do anything about it. Why, I don't believe anyone uses this room from one year to the next! The only reason I put the lock on the door was because the insurance company wanted it there."

Arthur shifted from one foot to the other. His mission completed, he was willing, in fact, anxious, to leave, but Mrs. Marsh seemed oblivious to this.

"I don't encourage transients," she said. "What I like is a nice steady gentleman boarder who's no fuss and bother. Now, take that trunk there," she pointed a bony forefinger at what appeared to be a mound of ashes, but which proved on a second look to be a trunk buried under years of dust. "When that gentleman moved in . . ."

Arthur found himself swaying on his feet while the gentle chirping went on and on. In this fashion he learned about the gentleman in the first-floor rear, the gentleman in the second-floor rear, and the gentleman in the third-floor front. It was as though her conversational stream had been dammed up so long that now that it was released there was no containing it. And through it all he sustained himself with one thought. He had got away with murder — really and literally got away with murder. When the door to the storage room closed behind him, Charlie Prince could rot away without a soul in the world being the wiser. The checks would come every month, five hundred dollars each and every month, and there was Ann Horton and the world of glory ahead. *The best of everything*, Arthur thought in and around Mrs. Marsh's unwearying voice, and he knew then what it felt like to be an emperor incognito.

The monologue had to come to an end some time, the heavy door was locked and stayed locked, and Arthur entered his new station with the confidence that is supposed to be the lot of the righteous, but which may also come to those who have got away with murder and know it beyond the shadow of a doubt. And even the tiniest fragment of unease could not possibly remain after he met Mrs. Marsh in the hallway one evening a few weeks later.

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"You were right," she said, pursing her lips sympathetically. "Mr. Prince *is* eccentric, isn't he."

"He is?" said Arthur uncertainly.

"Oh, yes. Like practising writing his name on every piece of paper he can get his hands on. Just one sheet of paper after another with nothing on it but his name!"

Arthur abruptly remembered his wastebasket, and then thought with a glow of undeserved self-admiration how everything, even unforgivable carelessness, worked for him.

"I'm sure," observed Mrs. Marsh, "that a grown man can find better things to do with his time than that. It just goes to show you."

"Yes," said Arthur, "it certainly does."

So, serenity reigned over Mrs. Marsh's. It reigned elsewhere, too, since Arthur had no difficulty at all in properly endorsing those precious checks, and even less trouble in spending the money. Using Charlie Prince's wardrobe as his starting point, he built his into a thing of quiet splendor. Drawing from Charlie Prince's narratives, he went to the places where one should be seen, and behaved as one should behave. His employer beamed on him with a kindly eye which became almost affectionate when Arthur mentioned the income a generous aunt had provided for him; his acquaintance with Ann Horton, who had seemed strangely drawn to him from the first evening they spent together, soon blossomed into romance.

He found Ann Horton everything he had ever imagined — passionate, charming, devoted. Of course, she had her queer little reticences, dark little places in her own background that she chose not to touch upon, but, as he reminded himself, who was he to cast stones? So he behaved himself flawlessly up to the point where they had to discuss the wedding, and then they had their first quarrel.

There was no question about the wedding itself. It was to take place in June, the month of brides; it was to be followed by a luxurious honeymoon; after which, Arthur would enter into a position of importance in the affairs of Horton & Son at a salary commensurate with that position, of course. No, there was no question about the wedding — the envy in the eyes of every fine young man who had ever courted Ann Horton attested to that — but there was a grave question about the ceremony.

"But *why* do you insist on a big ceremony?" she demanded. "I think they're dreadful things. All those people and all that fuss. It's like a Roman circus."

He couldn't explain to her, and that complicated matters. After all, there is no easy way of explaining to any girl that her wedding is not only to be a nuptial, but also a sweet measure of revenge. It would be all over the papers; the whole world of fine young men would be on hand to witness it. They had to be there, or it would be tasteless in the mouth.

"And why do you insist on a skimpy little private affair?" he asked

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in turn. "I should think a girl's wedding would be the most important thing in the world to her. That she'd want to do it up proud. Standing there in the living-room with your father and aunt doesn't seem like any ceremony at all."

"But you'll be there, too," she said. "That's what makes it a ceremony."

He was not to be put off by any such feminine wit, however, and he let her know it. In the end, she burst into tears and fled, leaving him as firm in his convictions as ever. If it cost him his neck, he told himself angrily, he was not going to have any hit-and-run affair fobbed off on him as the real thing. He'd have the biggest cathedral in town, the most important people — the best of everything.

When they met again she was in a properly chastened mood, so he was properly magnanimous.

"Darling," she said, "did you think I was very foolish carrying on the way I did?"

"Of course not, Ann. Don't you think I understand how high-strung you are, and how seriously you take this?"

"You are a darling, Arthur," she said, "really you are. And perhaps, in a way, your insistence on a big ceremony has done more for us than you'll ever understand."

"In what way?" he asked.

"I can't tell you that. But I can tell you that I haven't been as happy in years as I'm going to be if things work out."

"What things?" he asked, completely at sea in the face of this feminine ambiguity.

"Before I can even talk about it there's one question you must answer, Arthur. And, please, promise you'll answer truthfully."

"Of course I will."

"Then can you find it in your heart to forgive someone who's done a great wrong? Someone who's done wrong, but suffered for it?"

He grimaced inwardly. "Of course I can. I don't care what wrong anyone's done. It's my nature to forgive him."

He almost said *her* but caught himself in time. After all, if that was the way she wanted to build up to a maidenly confession, why spoil it? But there seemed to be no confession forthcoming. She said nothing more about the subject — instead, spent the rest of the evening in such a giddy discussion of plans and arrangements that by the time he left her the matter was entirely forgotten.

He was called into Mr. Horton's office late the next afternoon, and when he entered the room he saw Ann there. From her expression and from her father's he could guess what they had been discussing, and he felt a pleasant triumph in that knowledge.

"Arthur," said Mr. Horton, "please sit down."

Arthur sat down, crossed his legs, and smiled at Ann.

"Arthur," said Mr. Horton, "I have something serious to discuss with you."

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"Yes, sir," said Arthur, and waited patiently for Mr. Horton to finish arranging three pencils, a pen, a letter opener, a memorandum pad, and a telephone before him on the desk.

"Arthur," Mr. Horton said at last, "what I'm going to tell you is something few people know, and I hope you will follow their example and never discuss it with anyone else."

"Yes, sir," said Arthur.

"Ann has told me that you insist on a big ceremony with all the trimmings, and that's what makes the problem. A private ceremony would have left things as they were, and no harm done. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, sir," said Arthur, lying valiantly. He looked furtively at Ann, but no clue was to be found there. "Of course, sir," he said.

"Then, since I'm a man who likes to get to the point quickly I will tell you that I have a son. You're very much like him — in fact, Ann and I were both struck by that resemblance some time ago — but, unfortunately, my son happens to be a thoroughgoing scoundrel. And after one trick too many he was simply bundled off to fend for himself on an allowance I provided. I haven't heard from him since — my lawyer takes care of the details — but if there is to be a big ceremony with everyone on hand to ask questions he must be there. You understand that, of course."

The room seemed to be closing in around Arthur, and Mr. Horton's face was suddenly a diabolic mask floating against the wall.

"Yes, sir," Arthur whispered.

"That means I must do something now that Ann's been after me to do for years. I have the boy's address; we're all going over right now to meet him, to talk to him, and see if he can't get off to a fresh start with your example before him."

"Prince Charlie," said Ann fondly. "That's what we all used to call him, he was so charming."

The walls were very close now, the walls of a black chamber, and Ann's face floating alongside her father's. And, strangely enough, there was the face of Mrs. Marsh. The kindly, garrulous face of Mrs. Marsh growing so much bigger than the others.

And a trunk, waiting.

"Q"

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THE Y-SHAPED SCAR

by RUFUS KING

FELICITY OPENED THE DOOR. SHE smiled briefly and held out her hand. Dr. Colin Starr thought her nervous and flushed, though altogether lovely-looking — as her mother (whom Starr had not known) was reputed to have been.

"Thank you," she said. "Thank you ever so much for coming."

"I'm glad to, Felicity. How is she?"

"That's it. I think there's nothing wrong with her physically. She came downstairs before luncheon. She hasn't done that for months. She — well, she did *peculiar* things in the kitchen. I think she's frightened, Doctor — frightened stiff."

"Don't worry. We'll see."

"She's upstairs again now. I don't know why I bothered you. I just felt that I had to."

"Very right of you."

Starr placed hat and gloves, a warm overcoat, on a handsome buhl table in the large hall. Tortoise shell and white metal gleamed softly around the coat's gray tweed. The day was extraordinarily chilly for March, and he had thought there was a feeling of sleet in the bitter air. A fat woman with a pale face and lush blonde hair came from a doorway and toward them. Starr observed her casually, her girth, the excessive plumpness. Glands, he thought.

The woman smiled and looked at him with damp inquisitive eyes, and Felicity said:

"Miss Vernon, Doctor Starr."

Miss Vernon appraised his strong, solid figure, his agreeable face. She held a hand out and let it lie plumply in Starr's.

"A doctor?" Miss Vernon effaced the smile and turned to Felicity. "Mrs. Dieterling? Is she ill?"

"Not really. I just thought it best."

"How wise of you, dear! After all, at her age —"

"It's only seventy."

"*Well*, dear."

Miss Vernon smiled again at Starr, moved past them and up the stairs, a lethargic *blanc-mange*.

"Is she one of the paying guests?" Starr asked.

"Yes. She's in town for the Home Bureau. How-to-reupholster-old-furniture sort of thing. It's almost a vice with her, Doctor."

They walked toward the stairs.

"Not an unpleasant one."

"You'd find it so if you had her in the house. She examines each sagging chair-bottom and wants to glue up old drawers and things. Her talk begins and ends with webbing."

"Have you many others?"

"No, just two. A Miss Warbright came last week. She is a writer and doing some groundwork on an historical romance about early Ohio. She's

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rather weird about it, and wants to insist that everyone settled here in burlap Mother Hubbards. She almost takes it as a personal affront when Grandmother describes the gowns and millinery fresh by packet-boat from Paris. I don't mind her, though. Miss Ashland is the real trial."

"Your third?"

"Yes. She's *secretive*. You've known people who are?"

"You ought to listen in on some of my consultations. What is Miss Ashland secretive about?"

They were going along a broad upper hall, gloomy with dark walls on which hung weighty paintings of the Hudson River School, sullen with thunder-clouds and suggested lightning, and of no financial worth whatever.

"I don't know. It's the way Miss Ashland peers through those thick spectacles of hers. It's furtive. And she never says a thing."

"What does she do?"

"She said something vague about being connected with some labor bureau. She wasn't explicit."

Felicity opened a door, and they went into her grandmother's private sitting-room. Mrs. Dieterling was in a chair placed in a bay window, a slender and distinguished figure in black *faille*, with her white hair silvered against the chill gray panes. She raised slender ivory fingers in a request for silence until the final thin clear note of *Coming Through the Rye* had died out from the music box on a stand beside her chair.

It was a very fine music box which Mrs. Dieterling had fancied during a grand tour of Europe in the 'Nineties, and her late husband Alfonse had bought it for her while they had been stopping at Geneva. It played 36 airs on its single cylinder, and Mrs. Dieterling would be warmed with nostalgia and insist upon a respectful attention while any one of them was being tinkled.

She smiled at Starr cordially.

"You don't mind?"

"Not at all. The tune was charming."

They shook hands, and he thought how cold her fingers were. Almost bloodless.

"This is my doing," Felicity said.

"I'm glad, dear. I am not ill, Doctor, but it is fortunate you have come. There is something I would like to ask you."

"I'll leave you," Felicity said. She turned to Starr. "I'm becoming terribly domestic. Now that lunch is over, dinner looms. Don't ever run a boarding house."

"I don't think I could. I can fry an egg, broil venison, and ruin flapjacks. That ends it."

Felicity left, and Starr drew a chair over and sat down.

He said: "Well, now."

"I am interested, Doctor, in scars."

He regarded her with absorbed fascination. He sensed the pressure on her nerves, which she was trying to subdue. He thought Felicity had been right. He thought it fear.

"Why scars?"

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"Because Marcella Dorfrey has come back. She is here in this house."

The name reacted upon Starr with a sense of shock, for it evoked a *cause célèbre* which had furiously agitated the local scene about twenty years ago. It was concerned with a peculiarly miserable murder and the subsequent suicide of Mrs. Dieterling's daughter Anna — Anna Mansard, Felicity's mother. The broad details of the affair were simple to recall.

Anna Mansard was recently widowed at the time and was living with Felicity, then a child of two, in Mrs. Dieterling's home in Laurel Falls. As for Marcella Dorfrey, she was a local girl whom Mrs. Dieterling had engaged as a nurse for Felicity. Anna, who had just passed twenty-four, was exceptionally pretty in a flowerlike way, and of a temperament which had definitely been accepted as advanced neurotic.

Also at Laurel Falls during this period was a theatrical stock company which was no better and no worse than most stock companies and which changed its bill once a week. Barton Fonslow, the leading man of this troupe, was a typical matinée idol with a fine leg and a waistline which skeptics held was only kept within bounds by severe whalebone and elastic pressure. Certainly he was getting on, a fate which undoubtedly caused him to cast his melting eyes on Anna Mansard and the Dieterling money she would eventually inherit.

The reactions of Anna's dangerously neurotic temperament to what amounted to a whirlwind courtship on Barton Fonslow's part swung extravagantly from a fierce sort of happiness to a fiercer revulsion, which was based on a devotional sense of duty to her dead husband's memory. It was during one of those latter swings in which the State of Ohio claimed that she had murdered Barton Fonslow.

The case amounted to this: Barton Fonslow for private reasons lived in a small rented cottage belonging to the Dieterling estate. It was located at approximately a five-minute easy walk from the Dieterling house. A Mabel Wallace who went there every day to do the cooking and housework found him shot to death in the bedroom of this cottage on the morning of April 12, 1922.

Miss Wallace (who was 63 years old and hence instantly eliminated as a possible suspect) telephoned a palsied alarm to the police. They found the murder gun, which had been dropped near the doorway to Fonslow's bedroom, and shortly identified both the revolver, and the fingerprints on it, as Anna's.

Also in the room, on a small table, was one of Anna's initialed handkerchiefs. It was tightly crumpled and still faintly moistened with, they decided, her tears.

Anna, who protested her innocence whenever she emerged from an hysterical neurosis, had no alibi for the general hour approximated for the murder, beyond her statement that she had walked to her husband's grave in the Laurel Falls Cemetery, had

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communed there for a while, and then returned home and gone to bed. There had been no corroborative evidence of this whatever, other than her own plain word.

The District Attorney had paraded Anna's neurotic condition at considerable length and had advanced as her motive a fit of remorse (Exhibit B: the tear-sodden handkerchief) during which, in a condition of deranged homicidal mania, she had shot and killed Barton Fonslow. The jury agreed with this, and the judge gave her twenty years to life for homicide in the second degree. Anna had been in the penitentiary for only three days when she hanged herself with a rope made from strips of her prison dress.

Mrs. Dieterling was so stunned and crushed emotionally by the whole terrible experience that she lived in a state of daze for several weeks after Anna's tragic suicide. It was her grandchild, Felicity, who finally brought her back to reason and a desire to live. It came to Mrs. Dieterling how greatly, how more than ever then, Felicity would need her. It was during this transition period from daze to a returning sanity that Marcella Dorfrey left.

This leaving had had its curious aspects, for Marcella Dorfrey had not so much left as flown. She had been there one morning and was gone in the afternoon, not only from the house but from Laurel Falls. Furthermore, although taking all her clothes and belongings, she had left without a month's pay which was due, and with no explanation other than a scribbled note. This had stated in baldly melodramatic terms that she could no longer stay in a house run by a crazy old woman, nor act as a nurse for a child whose mother had been a murderess.

Nothing later had been heard of Marcella until, Starr realized, Mrs. Dieterling had just made her extraordinary statement to him, that now she was there in the house. He knew from experience that age had made Mrs. Dieterling both set and devious. It was of no earthly use to plunge to the heart of a thing with her. You followed her lead and eventually got there.

He said: "What do you want to know about scars?"

"Do they vanish? Can they be effaced?"

"Not if there has been a loss of the tissue of the true skin during healing."

"To be specific, Doctor: I refer to a cut on the wrist caused by pieces of broken glass."

"How was it healed?"

"I attended it myself — a bandage, then that favorite blood-clotter of my own childhood days, spiderwebs."

"There would surely have been granulations?"

"Yes, because Marcella later became dissatisfied with my treatment. She got hold of some newfangled thing of the moment. An ichthyol ointment. I remember that she applied it for the first time on the day of the murder."

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"Even so, if granulation had set in, the scar would never disappear."

"Not even after twenty years?"

"No matter how many years."

"Ah!"

Mrs. Dieterling, who was a semi-invalid (her joints), tightened pale fingers about the gold head of her cane. This cane was unusual, in that it sheathed a sword. Alfonse had bought it in Paris, and had always taken a childish delight in whisking out its blade to the startled distress of whatever companion would be with him on a stroll. This was a conceit which Mrs. Dieterling had not inherited, but she did keep the cane constantly with her as an aid to her invalidism, and also through fondness because it had been Alfonse's favorite stick.

"My plan must work," Mrs. Dieterling said. "I cannot understand why she hasn't shown signs before now. Only you shall take it off instead of me, Doctor."

"May I ask what?"

"The passementerie band which she wears around her wrist. My plan was essential, because after all there was the dilemma presented by her $50 a week, and the fact that I could not bring myself to the point of either snatching the band off nor demanding that she remove it."

Bewildering as this was as a whole, part of it did make sense. The $50 a week established the woman with the passementerie band as being one of Mrs. Dieterling's three paying guests. Starr knew that the money was of vital importance. He knew that Mrs. Dieterling had been forced only recently to go in for taking these guests after the final attrition of a large income which had had its source in securities that for years had ceased to pay any dividends at all.

As these securities had also been favorites of Alfonse's, Mrs. Dieterling had continued to cherish them for their sentimental values, and had only parted with them one by one under the pressure of some grim necessity.

"I find myself," Starr said, "confused."

"Naturally, Doctor. And I find it difficult to speak of these things even after the long past years. Some tragedies never die. Anna's did not. The effects live on, and I would not mind it if their sorrow and dangers had simply settled upon me."

"Dangers?"

"Why not? Murder breeds. That is an axiom. It stays dormant under fear of disclosure, ever ready to strike again. You see, there is Felicity."

"No, I don't quite. Felicity is a lovely girl, Mrs. Dieterling. A completely healthy and fine one. I have never found any trace of morbidity about her."

"That is true; but the shadow of Anna's tragedy has reached out at last to cover her. Forrest has asked her to marry him."

Starr knew Forrest Willeth very well, having bounced him through mumps and measles and, more recently, through his physical examination for the draft, which had rated him 1-A. He was a pleasant youngster,

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and his family was one of the solidest and wealthiest in Laurel Falls.

"Well," Starr said, "why doesn't she?"

"Surely it must be obvious? She loves Forrest as deeply as he loves her. She loves him so greatly, Doctor, that she will not permit him to marry the daughter of a murderess. She is perfectly logical about it. Both Hattie and John have naturally slated Forrest for a diplomatic career. They want him to follow in old Horace Willeth's footsteps — if not to St. James at least to some other embassy that will be left. So there you are."

"Yes, I see."

"Forrest is willing, more than willing, to give up anything for Felicity, but she won't let him. I would lose my love and respect for her if she were to. So it devolves upon me."

"To solve the problem how?"

"By proving that Anna was innocent. By proving that it was Marcella Dorfrey who murdered Barton Fonslow. I shall establish this woman's identity as Marcella, and have her arrested. I shall insist that the case be reopened and that she be tried.

"You only suspect this woman's identity, don't you?"

"I am positive."

"But isn't just wearing a passementerie band somewhat slender to base the belief on? Surely you have other reasons?"

"I have. To begin with, this woman — she now calls herself Miss Warbright and pretends to be an authoress — is about the age and of the appearance which Marcella would have grown into after twenty years."

"Then you do find a resemblance?"

"A sufficient one, Doctor. The woman is skinny and has the same sort of dun-colored hair, and the vague undistinguished features which Marcella's promised to grow into."

"How old was Marcella when she left here?"

"Eighteen. And apart from everything, Doctor, I harp on the scar which I am certain she conceals with that passementerie band."

"Was the scar distinctive in pattern?"

"It was shaped like a small Y with a longish tail. Parts of a broken tumbler were in a wastepaper basket, and Marcella had reached in to retrieve a pencil which had fallen from the desk. The scar is on the upper side of the wrist of her left hand, and is scarcely longer than an inch. Certainly the passementerie band would cover it."

"You will forgive me for becoming direct? Even though you do establish Miss Warbright as being Marcella Dorfrey, how on earth can you prove your daughter's innocence and Miss Dorfrey's guilt?"

"My conviction in Anna's innocence never was nor has been shaken."

"How do you explain the gun? The handkerchief?"

"Both were unquestionably Anna's. The gun had belonged to Henry, Anna's husband. Anna kept it among many of his things, all of which she cherished, in a cedar chest in her bedroom. Naturally she had handled it. If

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at no other time, she certainly must have held the revolver while placing it in the chest, and so her fingerprints were on it. As for the handkerchief, both the gun and any number of Anna's handkerchiefs were easily accessible to anyone."

"The tears on the handkerchief? Marcella Dorfrey's?"

"Either her tears or else she simply moistened it."

"Why weren't these points brought out at the trial?"

"They were. But there was nothing at the time to support any motive other than the one attributed to Anna. It was accepted as a crime of emotion committed by Anna during one of her fits of intense depression. They labeled it some sort of a neurotic revulsion, and managed to hint that Anna's intention had been to kill herself after she had shot Barton Fonslow. They hinted that she had lacked the nerve to do so when the moment came. Her later suicide clinched this belief in the official mind, of course. They refused to reopen the case."

"What was your theory, Mrs. Dieterling?"

"It was a crime of passion. It was Marcella who had been having an affair with Barton Fonslow, and not Anna. It was Marcella who shot him in a jealous rage when she learned of his intention to marry Anna, and it was she who planted the gun and the handkerchief against Anna."

"Have you any proof of this?"

"Yes. It was Marcella's flight that first made me wonder about her. It wasn't as if she had just left my employ; she left the town. She vanished. I knew this, because I attempted to get in touch with her to pay her the wages that were still due. She was a mercenary sort of girl, and it was entirely out of character for her to have gone off without her pay."

"Did you find anything concrete that could be used as evidence?"

"It was odd, Doctor. It was almost like Anna's hand reaching out — Anna, who was dead —"

"Yes?"

"I do not suggest the supernatural; and still, how can we know? How can we say positively that Anna's spirit, that her deep love for her child, did not guide Felicity to the letter?"

"A letter was your proof?"

"Yes. I must tell you that Felicity was over two at the time. She could walk, and had a modest vocabulary which she used at a great rate. This occurred when I was just beginning to be myself again. While I had been almost in a state of daze, Marcella had grown lax. She had left Felicity increasingly to her own devices. One of the maids told me afterward that Marcella would often leave Felicity in her crib with the side down. You don't know the nursery arrangement?"

"No, Mrs. Dieterling."

"Marcella's own room opened out of it, and Felicity would have the run of both rooms when Marcella was downstairs or out of the house. Felicity had the curiosity of a monkey."

"Most babies have."

"We never knew what would

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amuse her; what odd object she would covet. I recall clearly the events of the day when Marcella left. She went out for a walk during the morning, leaving Felicity alone in the nursery. Felicity chose that morning to go into Marcella's room, climb up on a chair, and take out everything in Marcella's desk. Then Felicity returned to her crib and went to sleep, which was how Marcella found her later."

"And the desk?"

"Exactly. Marcella believed that it was I and not Felicity who had searched it. She found the letter gone. She undoubtedly believed that I had taken it and would offer it at once to the police. She *must* have believed this, because it is the only sane explanation for her sudden flight."

"This letter — naturally, it was from Barton Fonslow?"

"It was. I found it in Felicity's crib after Marcella had gone. I was changing the clothes, and the letter had been shoved by Felicity under the blanket. I cannot stop thinking that it was Anna who had guided Felicity's hand to it, and had made Felicity want to keep it."

"Was there anything unusual about the paper that would have caught the interest of a child?"

"There was, and that is of course a saner explanation. Being an exhibitionist, Barton Fonslow had had a shield devised for his personal stationery. It was a flamboyant thing with the masks of comedy and tragedy and his initials beneath. This was printed in scarlet and the pictured masks were what had intrigued Felicity."

"What did the letter say?"

"Barton Fonslow said in it that he was through with Marcella. It was viciously insulting in an assured sort of way. I think I would have killed him myself had I received it."

"Did he mention Anna?"

"Yes. He said that he would permit nothing to stand in the way of his plans for marrying Anna. He told Marcella that he would pay her $100 to get rid of her."

"What did you do?"

"I went to the district attorney."

"You showed him the letter?"

"In my intense hope, in my excitement, I had not brought it with me. But I told him its contents. He was most courteous, most maddeningly polite. He said that many letters had been found in a trunk in Barton Fonslow's dressing-room at the theater."

"Mash notes?"

"Some, he said. And some which showed that the man's conquests had been numerous, and that if the case were to be reopened, the town would be blown apart by wholesale scandal."

"But your letter was one which Fonslow had written, not one that had been written to him."

"The district attorney acknowledged that. He said the letter was not unique, that the letters in the trunk showed that many of them were answers to letters which must have been as devastatingly cruel as the one Barton Fonslow wrote to Marcella."

"Surely he must have seen that Marcella alone had had the opportu-

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nity for getting Anna's handkerchief and the gun?"

"It was a point I also made. He regarded it indifferently. After all, it was he who had convicted Anna."

"Yes, there would be that."

"There *was* that, Doctor. To be fair about it, I must admit, as I admitted then, that Anna had been neurotic and that there had been moments when she had looked upon Barton Fonslow's suit with favor. I insisted there had been no impropriety, at which the district attorney became his most polite, and smiled."

"So it ended there?"

"He did suggest that I give him the letter and he would include it among the innumerable other letters in the files of the case. Something compelled me to refuse to do this. I think I felt that if I kept the letter it would give me some sort of power, some later control that would redeem the past."

"I think I understand how you felt. Did he permit you?"

"He did, and still with complete indifference. So far as he was concerned, a jury, the judge, and the fact that Anna herself had committed suicide had all closed the case."

Chill wind threw an icy blast against windows, and Mrs. Dieterling said bleakly: "Will you turn the thermostat up a little, Doctor?"

Starr did so. After he had returned to his chair, he said: "I am completely sympathetic, Mrs. Dieterling. You know that. But I cannot feel that the letter itself is of any stronger value as proof than it was twenty years ago."

"The point is that Marcella has considered that letter a deadly threat to her safety ever since the day when she fled. I know it is why she seized the first opportunity which the years have offered for returning to this house. I refer to my recent decision to take in paying guests. So she engaged a room here in the guise of Miss Warbright. It gives her the chance she has desperately longed for, to search for the letter. She believes it is in this room."

"Why?"

"Because she makes a point of coming in here to talk with me. Her pretense is her interest in my anecdotes of the early days in Ohio for the historical romance she is pretending to write." Mrs. Dieterling leaned forward on her cane. "But her eyes are everywhere, Doctor — searching for the hiding place while she talks — I will admit that this was not enough to make me connect her with Marcella until one of the keys to the cottage was stolen. Then it came to me suddenly like an inspirational flash: her searching eyes — the key to the cottage — and the passementerie band."

Hope (Starr marveled) was a wonderful and an imperishable thing. This tragic woman with her burden of the years, rising now with her remaining strength to do battle, no longer for herself or her dead Anna's memory but for the grandchild whom she loved. Blind against defeat and seizing upon straws.

He said: "What can I do?"

He felt it slipping from her and to him, this strength of hers.

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"It was the key to the front door of the cottage which was taken, Doctor. You will find the one to the back door still in a cubicle of that desk."

Starr went to the desk.

"Yes, it is here — labeled *Cottage, Back Door.*"

Whether or not it was a trick of the sleet-filtered daylight, Starr did not know; but Mrs. Dieterling, as he turned and observed her, had a thinness of edge which gave her an almost wraithlike and spiritual look.

She said: "That cottage has not been entered since the police were through with it twenty years ago. Something remains there to be found. Otherwise Marcella would not have come in here at some moment during the night and have stolen the key to its front door. You must be my eyes, Doctor." Her voice faltered and then took on some inner strength. "You must be Anna's eyes."

The door creaked complainingly and veils of dust grew active before an inrush of cold, gusting wind. The effect of the shuttered room was of dead murk, and Starr closed the door and stood still while the past seemed to filter about him. He discovered a switch, and was happy that the electricity had never been disconnected. Old filament bulbs were soft under dull, artistic shades: an atmosphere which re-created instantly the mood-tones Barton Fonslow had considered most devastating for his enterprises.

Starr stepped softly, unwilling to disrupt a sense of antagonistic privacy which had been the cottage's own for twenty years — until the other night when a key had been taken from a cubicle in a desk! But had the key as yet been used? He thought not. The film of dust on the floors was unbroken except for his own footprints. He observed the bedroom and the bed on which Barton Fonslow had been shot. Nothing compelled his interest — nor in the living-room, from which a door led to a modest kitchen.

Here too he found nothing that struck him as significant until he lifted a lid of the stove. Calcined clinkers lay there dead. He lifted the second lid and the metal support between them, and observed the ashen bed.

On the night of April 11, 1922, he thought, Mabel Wallace had finished serving dinner and had washed and put the things away. By the time Barton Fonslow had returned to the cottage from his evening performance at the theater, the fire which Mabel Wallace had left in the kitchen stove was either dying or out. When Mabel Wallace came on the following morning of the twelfth, she discovered Barton Fonslow's body before she had had time to shake the kitchen fire.

These ashes — Starr thought — were the ashes which had been in the grate on the night when Barton Fonslow was killed.

And so was that wad of gauze.

He removed it and smoothed it out. A bandage — one that had been cut with scissors from a small wrist. A woman's wrist. Marcella's? A dark and

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hardened stain caked it. Starr thought it easily could be ichthyol ointment, which would be simple either to prove or to disprove. A curious chill ran through him as he determined, faint in the hard dark patch, an indicative pattern of a Y-shaped scar. Yes, ichthyol had a habit of drying and retaining its rich dark brown except where the suppuration of the wound would absorb it and leave its design.

He thought: According to Mrs. Dieterling, Marcella first applied ichthyol ointment as a dressing on the day during the night of which Barton Fonslow was murdered. This bandage would establish her presence here in the cottage on the murder night. This must be true, because the ashes were cold when she threw the bandage into the grate. Otherwise it would have charred. And from the following morning on the cottage was in the control of the police: locked.

Then he thought: Barton Fonslow could logically have been an overfastidious man. It would be in character. Marcella came that night to kill, but first she must have wanted to give him one final chance. Could she have placed her arm about him, some further gesture to reawaken his dead passion for her? Ichthyol has an unpleasantly pungent, an oily, fishy smell. Fonslow could surely have made some derogatory remark about the stained, malodorous bandage, which would be why she had cut it off and thrown it into the kitchen grate.

Dr. Starr put the bandage in his coat pocket. He turned out lights, and soft shadowed grays enclosed him. He thought of how queer, harried, neurotic Anna would be vindicated at long last, how Mrs. Dieterling would find peace. And Felicity could marry her fine young man.

He walked, still softly, toward the door through the quiet privacy which was settling back within the cottage like a shroud. How could you tell? How could you tell about this?

About Anna. . . .

Mrs. Dieterling met him at the head of the stairs in the heavy grayness of the upper hall. Behind her a large canvas of a morbid child crouching in a rowboat on the Hudson River did little to efface the gloom.

Starr said: "There is hope, Mrs. Dieterling. Great hope."

"Thank God."

"There is enough to warrant our getting in touch with District Attorney Hefferfield. I know him very well. You will find him much more receptive than you found the district attorney of twenty years ago. There remains Miss Warbright and her passementerie band."

Mrs. Dieterling steadied herself against the press of her emotions. She leaned heavily upon her beloved Alfonse's cane.

"Shall we go to Marcella's room, Doctor? By now she will surely be asleep. I took the liberty before luncheon of going downstairs and putting two of the sedative tablets which you prescribed for me in the glass of vegetable juices she is accustomed to drink."

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"Yes," he said, with a helpless sort of admiration, "she will certainly be asleep."

He accompanied Mrs. Dieterling to the hall's end and through a door into a handsomely large bedroom weighted with heavy mahogany pieces elaborately carved. The woman on the bed had the deep breathing of deepest sleep. She was as Mrs. Dieterling had described her: a skinny woman with dun-colored hair.

Starr turned on a bed-lamp and gently unfastened from her left wrist the passementerie band. He examined the bared skin carefully, and then rubbed it for a moment with the palm of his hand.

He said: "There is no scar."

Mrs. Dieterling turned, and he followed her from the room. He closed the door. They walked in silence along the hall and into Mrs. Dieterling's sitting-room. Miss Vernon, the fat and glandular blonde, was seated beside the music box in the bay window. She stood as they came in.

"*Dear* Mrs. Dieterling! I wondered how you were."

She came over to them and placed plump hands with gushing affection on Mrs. Dieterling's shoulders. Starr felt a faint shock; and Mrs. Dieterling, who detested being touched, extricated herself and said coldly: "I am quite well, thank you, Miss Vernon. Have you met Doctor Starr?"

"Oh, yes, when he came. It's why *I* came. I did knock."

"We were engaged."

"Yes — well — I'll run along now."

"Miss Vernon —" A curious thrill gripped Starr as he unobtrusively blocked her path. "Mrs. Dieterling and I are bothered with a little problem. Can you help us?"

"Why, of course."

Mrs. Dieterling glanced at Starr sharply. A tinge of color returned to her drawn white face.

She said: "Let us sit down."

She took her chair again beside the music box, and Starr drew up two others for Miss Vernon and himself.

"You have just come in, Miss Vernon?" Starr said.

"Yes, just a minute ago."

"You found it cold outdoors?"

"Bitterly so, Doctor. Do tell me what's the problem."

"You are, Miss Vernon."

"*Me?*"

"When did you first start to put on weight? About ten years ago?"

"Why, really — I don't know what to say — I mean, I don't understand."

Starr said quietly: "This is a little more serious than plain professional curiosity. I suspect that your trouble is glandular. I have known cases where a slim girl of eighteen or twenty, who weighed scarcely more than 95 pounds, put on weight in later years to about what you must weigh. Your hair is of course colored with a golden rinse."

"I — really — *well!*"

"No — sit still, please. I am further puzzled about you: There is the paradox that as a worker for the Home Bureau you can afford to pay $50 a week for board and lodging."

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"This is the utmost in impertinence. I have money of my own."

"Then why do modestly paid work for the Home Bureau? Unless your guise as being interested in reconditioning old furniture made it possible for you to examine the different pieces in this house for the letter?"

"Guise! Letter?"

Mrs. Dieterling had leaned forward in her chair. She seized Miss Vernon's left wrist and examined it, until Miss Vernon, startled, snatched it from her.

Mrs. Dieterling sighed and closed her eyes.

"You are wrong. There is no scar."

Miss Vernon plunged into thorough anger. She held out her left wrist and examined it herself.

"Scar? Of course I have no scar."

"On the contrary," Starr said.

"Here — look for yourself. I demand a full explanation about this!"

Starr took Miss Vernon's hand and held it in his left. With his right fingers he gently rubbed the skin of Miss Vernon's left wrist.

"Scars, even though they may be indelible," he said, "may yet become obscured by lapse of time and other conditions. Growing stoutness is an example. The tissue of a scar is dense and white and fibrous, Miss Vernon."

She regarded him with hypnotized fascination as his fingers, in their rubbing of her wrist, pressed harder.

"A scar has no true derma, with vessels or hair-follicles; and that is why, Miss Vernon, cold may bring a seemingly obscured scar into view. The surrounding skin reddens and leaves its pattern white. You have just come in from the bitter cold, and when you placed your hands upon Mrs. Dieterling's shoulders as we joined you, the heat of the house had not had enough time to efface the scar's trace."

"But when I looked —" Mrs. Dieterling said.

"By then, yes, it was gone. But there is this: Rubbing has the same effect as cold. It makes the surrounding skin red while leaving the scar white. Like this, Miss Dorfrey. You see?"

The woman had gone ashen. She stared down at her left wrist with its Y-shaped scar, quite visible now, quite plain. Her moist eyes had a beaten terror in them, one that had been piling up for twenty years.

Mrs. Dieterling unscrewed the head from Alfonse's cane.

"I broke the sword off years ago," she said. "This letter has been in it ever since. The one from Barton Fonslow, Marcella, which he wrote to you."

Starr returned with Felicity to Mrs. Dieterling's room an hour later, after Hefferfield had come and had taken Marcella Dorfrey away. Mrs. Dieterling stopped them at the threshold with a gesture of her ivory fingers until the final glissando of *Love's Old Sweet Song* had died out from the music box.

"I have been playing the air for Anna," Mrs. Dieterling said. "She loved it very much. She found it remarkably soothing. She would say it brought her peace."

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Meet Margaret Page Hood whose story, "The Green Weed," won a Third Prize in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest. Mrs. Hood writes us that she spent a "handful of years" as a newspaper correspondent (A.P., El Paso Herald Post, and Albuquerque Journal) in the great Southwest and during that time witnessed many fascinating real-life mysteries — for which, says Mrs. Hood, that section of the country is especially noted. As an official crime reporter, she became associated with several New Mexican sheriffs, who weren't very different from the sheriff in "The Green Weed," and with their help covered courtroom trials, train robberies, and desert killings. Now Mrs. Hood is living in Vinalhaven, Maine, and she has been there long enough to be "soaked to the ears with salt spray and Maine solitude" — with the result that many of the strange mysteries which she reported in the past are coming back to her in the guise of stories — as Mrs. Hood expressed it, "bread well buttered upon the waters."

And now that you have met the author, meet sheriff Felipe Ortega and Dona Rodriguez, the enchanting widow with the thirteen children. The thirteen muchachos are as charming a group of detective-apprentices as you have ever met — a ragged band of New Mexican Irregulars who perform in the best Baker Street tradition. But keep your eye on the buxom widow, with her warm smile and her flashing eyes: a woman who can look so enticing at a wash tub, scrubbing thirteen assorted sizes of blue jeans, is a rare and dangerous creature . . .

THE GREEN WEED

by MARGARET PAGE HOOD

FELIPE ORTEGA squinted against the smoke of his brown-paper cigarette, and through the haze gave the man a quizzical glance.

"So, *amigo*," he drawled, "your wife has run off with a fruit tramp. You expect me to get her back for you?"

Pedro Zamorra's swarthy face flushed. In his own village he was an arrogant cock, a self-style *abogado*, a homemade lawyer, who settled his neighbors' disputes with sly skill. If the amusement underlying the Sheriff's words galled, he answered smoothly enough,

"Yes, Sheriff, Maria has run away from me."

"What makes you think she ran off with this fruit tramp?"

"Even a husband doesn't wear blinders, Sheriff. This gringo came a

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few weeks ago from Arizona to Polvo Rojo to work in the cantaloupes. He's young, handsome, bold as *el diablo* himself. The women are crazy for him. I catch him talking and laughing with Maria when she carried water to the pickers. At first she fooled me. She jeered at him, calling him El Chongo, the monkey who itches from many fleas. But Saturday night at the dance," he shrugged, "I found them together under the cottonwoods by the river bank."

"Why didn't you lock her in the house until the fellow left town?"

Zamorra lifted disparaging hands, "I believed her when she cried and swore she loved me only."

Fool, thought the Sheriff, with your stooped shoulders and scraggly goat beard. He remembered the last time he'd seen Maria. He'd stopped at Zamorra's to fill his canteen before riding into the Ladrones after Chopo, who'd knifed a man in a fight over the girl at El Elefante Blanco. Zamorra hadn't been home, but Maria had welcomed him into her kitchen, with its dirt floor broom-clean, *frijoles* bubbling in a clay *olla* on the hearth, the mocking bird sulking in the willow cage by the window. Maria had been round and tempting as a wild plum, with her smooth skin and soft ways. Yet a modest woman, the Sheriff had decided, with an eye quick to appraise feminine possibilities. Poor little woman, who could blame her if she'd fallen ripe and mellow into a hand younger and more expert than Zamorra's gnarly paw?

"Sunday morning," the man continued, "the truck came to take the fruit tramps to the Colorado fields. I saw this fellow riding with his legs dangling, his hat on the side of his head, a grin on his face. He waved as the truck passed, but Maria paid no attention. I drew a sigh of relief. She made a pot of *pozole* for Sunday dinner, and we ate as happy as a pair of doves."

More like a croaking crow with a plump rose-breasted love bird in your nest, her wings unclipped, thought Ortega.

"Monday morning I rode to Las Palomas to draw up the will of Jesus Ybarra, who's dying of a pain in the chest. When I returned that night, pfft! my bird had flown."

"You expect me to chase after her and snatch her from the fruit tramp? *Caramba*, *hombre*, that's not the way for men of our blood. If a woman runs from us we go after her, give her a beating, and drag her home. Or if she's ugly and talks too much," the Sheriff ground his cigarette under the heel of his gaily embroidered boot, "we say out of sight, out of mind, and find another woman."

"You misunderstand me," Zamorra thrust out his lower lip so that the goat beard waggled. "I don't want this woman back. I'm asking you to find La Crema, my palomino mare. Ah, what a horse! Golden hide and tail of silver. You may not know, Sheriff, but I'm a breeder of fine palominos, and La Crema's the pick of the lot. That wanton, that *buena-*

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por-nada, my wife, rides off with La Crema in chase of the fruit tramp. Senor Ortega, as a citizen and taxpayer of Polvo Rojo I demand the return of my horse."

"And Maria?"

"Ugly and limber-tongued, or beautiful and silent, I believe with you, Sheriff, when it's a case of a wanton woman, out of sight, out of mind. I can find me a better woman, but never another mare like La Crema."

"Well, *hombre*, give me a description to send to my deputies in neighboring towns. Black eyes, as I recall, black hair in a braid around her head. What was she wearing?"

"The woman? How should I know? A skirt cut short to show her slim ankles, a blouse cut low to show her more obvious charms. What do women wear? But the mare, I can tell you exactly. She was carrying my best hand-tooled saddle with the silver *conchas*. I checked my gear and that's what is missing. *Diablo* take women, they want nothing but the best when they run to their lovers."

Zamorra slapped his sombrero on his narrow head, twitched his coat tails, and hurried out the door. As his footsteps died along the corridor the Sheriff turned to his deputy, Viramontes, who during the interview had sat tilted back in his chair, boot heels hooked over the rungs, eyes half-closed.

"Wake up, you lazy brother of a mangy coyote! Our bandy-legged citizen and taxpayer of Polvo Rojo demands action around this office."

Viramontes grinned at his chief. "He's a wise *hombre*. *El diablo* take my wife, he says, but *por Dios*, Sheriff, get onto your job and bring back my horse."

Ortega stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Dona Rodriguez doesn't seem to think much of the man."

"Ah, the beautiful widow!" The deputy sent a ringer into the brass cuspidor and rubbed fat hands together.

"They say the beautiful widow knows what goes on behind every closed door in Polvo Rojo. What she doesn't see or hear, two or three of her thirteen kids find out for her. They're like thirteen chicks hunting fat potato bugs to bring home to mama hen. Too bad she's a woman or I might give her your job, *mi Gordo*. They told me never to appoint a fat man if I wanted action. But to get back to the widow, she got this note to me before old Zamorra had a chance to show his face in here."

A hasty pencil had scrawled *Something bad goes on here with Zamorra, better you come.*

Viramontes read it. "Woman chatter, Sheriff. Women always try to make a haystack out of three straws. But a poor excuse is better than none to call on the widow." He lifted the paper to his pudgy nose and sniffed. "Such sweetness, *hombre*. It's well-known the widow carries a vanilla bean in her bosom. That's powerful magic. If you ride into Polvo Rojo watch out it isn't you instead of Zamorra's palomino the widow catches."

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The Sheriff thrust a toe around the back legs of the tilted chair and sent his deputy sprawling. The sound of Viramontes's laughter followed him down the hall, mingled with the wailing song of Chopo in the jail-house next door. Chopo crooned a thin falsetto as he dreamed of the girl at El Elefante Blanco. The mournful longing of the song made Ortega vaguely uncomfortable.

The clouds hung hyacinth-pink above the mountains when the Sheriff set out on his bay horse Campeon for Polvo Rojo. The county had recently bought him a Model T, but he felt more at ease in the saddle than jouncing over rutted roads on the slippery leather seat of the fractious car. The air was fresh and cool. The river ran at full brown tide against tule-rimmed banks. With his eyes closed he would have known when he passed the cantaloupe fields, for the sour-sweet smell of rotting melons filled the air. The alfalfa was the rich green of summer, and a swarm of yellow butterflies wove magic above the purple blossoms. In a dead cotton-wood a flock of young herons clung, strange snowy fruit. At the sound of Campeon's hoof beats they rose, hung for a moment against the sky, then wheeled down the river. To the west the dark masses of distant mountains held the shadows tenaciously against full day.

As he rode the Sheriff hummed Chopo's tune. Absently, he thrust a hand into his pocket and drew out the crumpled note. Viramontes was right — a faint perfume clung to the paper. He tore it into shreds and scattered them along the wind. A man would be *poco loco* to think of the widow. Thirteen kids, and she still young. A husband's nose would be whittled to a point against that domestic grindstone. He'd better keep his mind strictly on the business of Zamorra. Though Viramontes was probably right. It was a haystack of three straws, no more than an old man's spleen at a runaway wife, and perhaps a stolen horse.

A sheriff's job was the devil. He wondered why he loved it as other men nursed a passion for *tequila* or women. It was four parts running down futile gossip and false rumors, and one part the strange excitement of solving the hard and desperate crime. Over all spread the cloak of political glamor. To the *gente*, the loyal people, he was the knight of the ballot box. To the district judge — he grimaced. Right at the moment he was a pain in the judicial neck, the man who was still unsuccessful in tracking down the suddenly increased sale of marijuana in the county. Today marijuana, tomorrow the gamblers behind the pool room, next week the women of the long 'dobe. Always the judge with his gentle eyes and the narrow skull of a fanatic would sting him like a gadfly. Pfft! his skin was thick, and at the moment the morning was a caress upon his shoulder.

The village of Polvo Rojo lay to the west of the river, its flat-roofed

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'dobe houses the rusty red of the dust which gave it its name. Unless the traveler along the highway knew of its existence he might pass it by, so perfectly did it melt into the landscape.

Polvo Rojo had a bad name. It had been settled by bandits from Mexico, and down the years it had been a hideout for more than one desperate fellow fleeing the law. It drew its protective coloring over its head like a dingy blanket and silently defied the curiosity of strangers. Only its fields lying along the west river bank bound it with narrow green ribbons to the normal life of the valley. Sheriffs before Ortega had been known to shun its narrow streets and aimless alleys unless well accompanied by deputies. But Ortega showed no hesitation as he crossed the river and sent Campeon plunging up the west bank.

He found the widow Rodriguez at the wash tubs under the apricot trees, her arms elbow deep in suds. The scent of mesquite roots burning under a sooty kettle was pungent; a line of blue jeans, from the small breeches of five-year-old Juanito to the man-sized pantaloons of Alfredo, was drying in the sun, pegged on the barbed-wire fence. Dona Rodriguez gave him a warm smile, thrusting the soft black fringe of hair from her face with a soapy arm. A fine line of moisture beaded her upper lip, and the curves of her bosom were plainly visible beneath her thin cotton blouse. A woman who looks enticing at the wash tubs, thought Ortega, is a rare and dangerous creature. He tossed the reins over Campeon's head. A flurry of small boys ran for the honor of leading the horse to water. Dona motioned him to a seat under the trees where the shadows of leaves danced in the sun, and now and then an over-ripe fruit pattered to the ground.

"It's good you come," she said. "Something bad goes on in the house across the road," she motioned toward the sprawling cluster of 'dobe buildings behind the tangle of tamarix trees.

"Pedro!" she called. A thin rough-haired boy appeared around the corner. "God sent me no girls," she said to Ortega, "so I make the best of my bargain and train Pedro to help me in the kitchen. Bring coffee, *muchacho*, and a plate of *sopaipillas*."

Over the crisp, sweet, fried cakes and bitter coffee Ortega told her of Zamorra's visit.

"Sly one," she shrugged. "He knows the neighbors are whispering about Maria's disappearance. He thinks he'll put you off the track by telling his story first. Crying for his stolen mare, is he? *Madre santissima*, I don't believe Maria laid a hand on that animal."

The Sheriff licked the melted sugar from the *sopaipillas* off his fingers and set his empty cup on the ground. "*Señora*, what's your version of the affair? Did she fall in love with a fruit tramp?"

Dona's plump shoulders moved

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under the thin blouse. "*Quién sabe?* Who can blame her, married to the old man? Before this she's been a scared bird never venturing from the nest. But along comes this gringo! *Por Dios*, he's handsome. Even I had to smile when he rolled a blue eye at me. But toward the last of the cantaloupe picking he had eyes only for Maria. What happened? Maybe more, maybe less, Maria was discreet. Only on Saturday night at the dance they were naughty children who see the sweet being taken from the table, for on Sunday the fruit tramps were leaving. What Zamorra saw under the cottonwoods, only he and the moon know. The old one's face was evil when he passed the dance hall door, his skinny claws clutching Maria's arm."

"He didn't offer to fight the gringo?"

"Fight, that one? He fights only with sly tricks and with words, like the time he threatened to haul me into court because my little pig trampled a few of his carmote vines. *Buen abogado, mal vecino* — good lawyer, bad neighbor — that saying fits him like a skin. No, he didn't fight the gringo, but dragged Maria from the dance. As I passed his house on my way home I heard a cry. It was Maria's voice. I should have run to protect her, but I thought he only beats her. That's the husband's privilege, no? One blow, maybe two, then the embrace? Tomorrow morning, I thought, I'll take the salve of herbs and coyote fat and rub her bruises. But early the next morning *Señora* Garcia was brought to bed of twins and I went to help her. It wasn't until the next day I sought Maria.

"She wasn't at home. Zamorra thrust his ugly face out the door and growled she'd stolen La Crema and run away. There was evil in the air — I felt it in all my bones. I ran home to ask the *muchachos* if they'd seen Maria leaving on La Crema. Especially Alfredo, who's turned fifteen and lately has been watching Maria with that man-look in his eyes. But no, they hadn't seen her."

She took the cigarette Ortega rolled for her and sighed as the smoke issued in blue streams through her finely cut nostrils. "You think I'm foolish, no? A woman who chatters? But I think it's time we went to Zamorra's house."

Zamorra wasn't home. The blue door swung open at a touch. The kitchen was silent, the air heavy with burned grease and boiled coffee of a man's cooking. Ashes were scattered on the hearth, cold *frijoles* gummed the dirty *olla*, dust collected on the window sills, and in its cage the mocking bird sprawled.

"*Pobrecito*," Dona lifted the bird gently, "the old one forgot its food."

She crumbled a bit of broken *tortilla* and thrust it into the gaping beak, washing it down with a drop of the red wine from a bottle on the table. The bird gasped and fluttered. She stroked its limp feathers and thrust it into the warm shelter of her bosom. Ortega was wandering around

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the kitchen. The last time he'd been there it had been a bright and cheerful place. With Maria gone, it was the hearth when the fire has died. Dona's hand on his arm turned him toward the bedroom.

The wooden shutter was still closed. A thin red pencil of sun thrust through, tracing the outline of the bed with its dark canopy. The bedding lay smooth; only one corner turned back showed where Zamorra had slept the night before.

"The dried-up old one," said Dona, "he hasn't the blood for dreams that rumple a man's bedclothes."

She moved to the walnut bureau with its mottled marble-top. A silver brush lay there, a long black hair caught in its bristles.

"Zamorra would sweat blood if the silver brush that once belonged to his mother was missing," she said shortly. She pushed apart the heavy doors of the wardrobe, Ortega peering over her shoulder.

"Empty," he grunted. "I think, *Señora*, you and I are baying at a paper moon. The little bird has taken her pretty feathers and flown away just as Zamorra said."

"Men," grumbled the widow, "you know nothing of women. Would a girl take her dirty apron and patched petticoat to her lover's arms? If only her spangled skirt and embroidered blouse from Juarez were missing I'd say you and Zamorra were right. But everything's gone, down to the faded *rebozo* she wore on windy days, the torn cotton chemise she would put on to go out bathing in the ditch."

"Perhaps she thought her lover wouldn't care to buy new clothes."

"*Chihuahua!*" Dona tossed her head. "What woman runs to a pinch-penny lover? A stingy husband is bad luck enough."

On the night table the candle had burned out in its red votive glass. Something fell as Ortega knocked against the table. Dona picked it up.

"The Virgin of Guadelupe," she said, "carved from bone by the hermit who lived in the cave above Mesilla. He gave it to Maria's grandfather, and now it is her *padrona*. *Ai, ai, ai,*" the widow brushed quick tears away, "the *pobrecita* must be dead, for she'd never leave behind the sweet Lady who carries her prayers."

Ortega restrained an impulse to comfort the widow in the way he knew best. Instead he laughed and pinched her arm. "Nonsense, *Señora!* You tell me I know nothing of women, but I know this. It would be a foolish girl who'd run away leaving her clothes behind and taking only a bone image for company. So, we find this girl has carefully taken all her clothes but forgotten the little Virgin. What can we think? Why, nothing but that she's on her way to her gringo lover."

The widow's tears still rolled. Ortega was saved from himself by the opening of the door.

"*Madre mia,*" the widow jumped and blew her nose on her apron, "the old one's caught me spying."

It wasn't Zamorra, but a rangy boy with rough sideburns running

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amuck on thin cheeks, the first faint smear of manhood darkening his lip.

"*Señor*," he said solemnly, "I come to report. I've searched and found no trace."

"Searched? But who are you?"

"Searched Zamorra's corrals, of course."

"He's Alfredo," said the widow, "my oldest. First Alfredo, then the twins Jesus and Jaime, next Alberto, then Ignacio, Patricio, Pedro —"

"Not the roll-call, *madre*," said the boy impatiently. "*Señor*, I continue the report. No trace of the palomino mare in Zamorra's corral, nor of the saddle with the silver *conchas*. Jaime and Jesus report the mare isn't in the corral of Zamorra's compadre, Ramon Gutierrez. Alberto has hunted the river bank where sometimes the horses graze. Ignacio looked in the jacal at the edge of the mesa. Patricio — "

"*Por Dios*," exclaimed the sheriff, "have I acquired a posse?"

"We Rodriguez men have come to the aid of the law, *Señor*. All except Pedro, who works in the kitchen, and Juanito, who's too young to run into danger. We sat him on the fence post to watch for buzzards."

"*Ai, ai*, not the buzzards," groaned the widow, as she brushed past the boy and headed for home.

Alfredo lifted his shoulders in a shrug, and gave the Sheriff a man-to-man look. Why could women never accept the truth without tears? Naturally buzzards. Zamorra had killed his wife. He was a lawyer full of tricks, so he'd killed the mare too. It made a good story to tell the neighbors and to put the Sheriff off the track of a murdered wife. Lucky the Sheriff had the Rodriguez boys to put him wise. Two bodies, many buzzards. It wouldn't take eleven boys with sharp eyes long to solve the mystery.

"We stand ready for orders, *Señor*," and Alfredo moved his bare feet impatiently across the floor. *Por Dios*, when he was Sheriff he wouldn't let flies collect on his flank.

"Fan your men out across the mesa, two by two," said the Sheriff, rising to the occasion.

The boy nodded. He flipped a finger to his hat brim, wheeled smartly, and vanished at a run.

There was a twinkle in Ortega's eyes. It did no harm to let the little rascals feel important. On the off-chance. Boys had the instincts of hunting dogs. He remembered it was a lad not as old as Alfredo who'd found the broken red shoe of the girl who'd been killed in Ysleta last year. Found the shoe and the thin little body half-buried in the sand. Perhaps he'd take a look himself. This Rodriguez family was so sure the old man had murdered his wife. It might be only their chance to vent their dislike of a neighbor who'd threatened to haul the widow and her pig into court, but then again — he remembered Zamorra's sly face.

He passed Juanito, a small fat god on a pedestal.

"Any buzzards, *nino*?"

"No, *Señor*," the black eyes behind

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the curving lashes were wide with importance, "but six crows in the corn field."

Ortega pinched the round cheeks. Cute kid. He cut off that train of thought abruptly. What did he want with kids? He mounted Campeon and followed the boys across the mesa.

"Where's the Sheriff?" asked the widow, as she ladled out the *frijoles* a few hours later.

Alfredo shrugged. "For a big man, *madre*, the Sheriff has the very bad health. He says he must watch himself or his stomach gets his heart into trouble. I left him at the *tienda*, to wait for the *telefono* from the deputy Viramontes."

"*Estupido!*" scolded the widow. She smiled even as she grumbled. A man afraid is a man half-caught . . .

"Louder," bellowed Ortega into the wall phone at the *tienda*, "speak up, *hombre!* What? Santa Fe's called in to report they've questioned the fruit tramp? He's got a girl with him?"

Alfredo tugged at the Sheriff's arm. "Come quick, *señor*. A palomino, running lame, has come into Zamorra's corral."

Ortega banged up the phone. "A palomino, *muchacho?* If it's La Crema, that clinches Zamorra's story."

Zamorra, bending solicitously over the animal, raised a scowling face. "See, Sheriff, just as I told you. The *buena-por-nada* stole the mare, then turned her loose when she found the fruit tramp."

With crooked, yellow fingers he combed the silver mane tangled with burrs, wiped a slobber of foam from the golden, velvet lips. "*El diablo* take the woman! The poor beast has run herself nearly to death getting home. The woman compares ill with the horse, no?"

The Sheriff examined a broken thong which had once held a silver *concha* in place. "Must have come through rough country."

"Yes, must have cut across the mesa and through the bosque. Scratched up around the belly and legs. The main thing is I have her back. No thanks to you, Sheriff. You can get home to Las Cruces now and tend to your politics." He gave a sour smile.

"Never mind politics, Zamorra," said the Sheriff sharply, "perhaps you'll be interested to know that Santa Fe reports the fruit tramp has stopped off there and has a woman with him."

"Let her stay with him," snapped the other, "I'm satisfied. *Adios*, Sheriff, shut the corral gate after you and take this young *diablo* with you."

The boy, who'd squatted by the horse pulling burrs from the knotted tail, freeing the stirrups from a snarl of weeds caught in the irons, dodged Zamorra's threatened blow and ran out the gate.

"*Madre santissima*," exclaimed the widow, "so that's the way of it, Sheriff? The horse safe in the corral

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and the woman in Santa Fe. *A que tonteria!* What a great foolishness, me and my suspicions, no?"

She snatched a bit of green Alfredo was twirling in his fingers. "Stop, *muchacho*, you make me nervous."

"Nothing but a weed I pulled from the horse's stirrup."

She rubbed the sprig gently between thumb and finger, then put it to her nose, inhaling deeply. Suddenly she turned to Ortega, "Let's you and I take a ride into the mountains. The sun will soon be down and the night wind up — a good time for riding."

"Excuse me, *Señora*," Ortega twirled his hat in embarrassment. *Por Dios*, the woman sounded dangerous. Sunsets, moon, cool night breezes, probably a little picnic supper under the *piñons*. Anything could happen to a man. "Perhaps another time," he stuttered, "I've neglected the office today —" he headed for the door.

"The scalded cat dreads the cold water, Sheriff? *Pues*, some woman must have set a bad fire to your tail. Don't be afraid. This ride will be strictly business. Bad business."

They headed toward a canyon where already the shadows gathered. The sunset reflected in lavender beauty on the eastern peaks. The pinkish cream of the sand verbena sent up a heady fragrance as the horses trampled its dust gray foliage. Ortega should have enjoyed himself. The widow's shoulders swayed seductively to the rhythm of her horse. The gold circles in her ears winked boldly. Alfredo's mule clippity-clopped at a discreet distance. But the Sheriff could only wonder where she was taking him and why. Especially why.

They turned up the canyon through a pass so narrow their legs scraped against rough rock walls. Now the canyon widened, and a valley opened before their eyes. A stream trickled among granite boulders, ferns grew moist and cool. Mountain ash trees raised smooth gray trunks. In the center of the valley they saw a house, built roughly of stone, with a corral close by, and a garden patch of green.

"What's this?" cried Ortega.

"The secret *ranchito* of Zamorra," replied the widow.

"How did you know about it?"

"Let that go until later," she answered.

Alfredo was off his mule, running to the corral. "Fresh tracks of a horse," he called. "Look, Sheriff, the fence is recently broken. The mare must have kicked her way out."

"H'm," muttered Ortega, "sweet water in this tub and a good supply of grain left."

"Zamorra would never let his horse suffer," said the widow. She picked up a small object and placed it in the Sheriff's palm.

"A silver *concha* from Zamorra's saddle. So, he had La Crema hidden carefully in his secret valley. The crafty crow thought he'd fool me into hunting for a stolen horse!"

"You're too smart a man for him to fool," said the widow.

"But how then did Maria get to her fruit tramp in Santa Fe?

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"You are a smart man, Sheriff, but like all smart men sometimes a bit too hasty. You cut Viramontes off in the middle of his call, remember? He called back again and I took the message. There's a girl with the fruit tramp. *Madre santissima*, there's always a girl with a fellow like him. But this time she's a *rubia*, a red blonde who works in a chili joint down by the railroad tracks, so Viramontes reported."

"You're a close-mouthed woman," said Ortega.

"A virtue you men admire, so I've heard."

"In the home, but not in the field."

She gave him an amused glance between lashes as thick and curly as Juanito's. "I talk upon provocation, *Señor*."

Alfredo came running up, a bit of red flannel in his hand. "I found it caught on a branch of the ash tree."

The widow smoothed it between gentle fingers, her face suddenly sad with the sadness of one who has her fears confirmed.

"A piece torn from the *chino poblano* skirt she wore to the dance. She was proud of that skirt. It was her only finery. She earned the money for it when she worked in *Señora* Madrid's kitchen before the bad day she married Zamorra. *Pobrecita*, she can't be far away."

There was no sign of a newly made grave. Not among the ferns, nor in the soft leaf mold under the trees. Not in the corral where the hooves of the mare had beaten a restless tattoo. Not in the dreary little house with its hard-packed dirt floor, smooth as a table. Ortega went down to the garden patch. He returned with an angry face, a handful of green clenched in his fist.

"Did you know of this?" he demanded.

The widow did not answer.

"It's getting dark," the boy complained, his stomach talking, "I'm hungry. Let's come back tomorrow."

The Sheriff stared thoughtfully at the dark house, his lower lip pinched between thumb and finger. He seemed to have forgotten his anger over the handful of weeds he'd thrown in the water.

"*Chihuahua*," he clapped Alfredo on the shoulder, "you're a lazy *hombre*. Supper and bed, you say? That's no way for a member of the Sheriff's posse. Come, let's you and me do Zamorra a favor before we go. I see he has an irrigation ditch leading from the stream to his fine garden. I wager we'll find a shovel at the corral. Let's irrigate for him before we leave."

"Have you gone crazy," exclaimed the widow, "doing favors for him?"

Ortega paid no attention. He soon had the earth dam away from the mouth of the ditch, and with his shovel he directed a lively flow of water along the narrow sides.

"*Cuidado*," yelled Alfredo, "take care or it'll go the wrong way. You'll have it in the house in a minute."

The Sheriff grinned. "We're doing a kindness to the old man, *muchacho*.

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We're cleaning up his dirty hovel."

The widow watched wide-eyed. The water flowed into the house and stood a few inches deep over the floor.

"Enough," said the Sheriff, and stopped the flow with a shovel of earth. "Alfredo, we'll enjoy a cigarette together and watch the moon come up."

They sat silent, the Sheriff content to puff on his cigarette, the other two watching him uneasily. The moon rose, a dusky disc behind black peaks. The night wind lifted the damp hair from the widow's forehead, sent a quick chill down her spine. It stirred the leaves of the ash trees, moved stealthily among the ferns. The door of the house groaned at its insistence. It whispered of things unseen, unheard, unknown. Dona tightened the *reboza* around her shoulders. She felt a sudden desire to touch the Sheriff's brown hand lying quietly on his knee; instead, she threw an arm around Alfredo's shoulder. He stiffened and inched away, too much a man to seek comfort, too much a boy to give it.

The Sheriff rose and stretched with a wide-mouthed yawn. "Come on, *hombre*," he said, "there's a lantern by the corral gate. Bring it."

They followed the will-o'-the-wisp of orange glow. Shadows moved inside the room, shadows fluttered like a torn skirt. The widow crossed herself. They were only the shadows of the ragged curtain at the window, swaying in the wind. Two yellow eyes shone in the lantern rays. The widow shrieked. There was a scuttling in the drift of dried leaves.

"A pack rat!" The boy's heart was pounding, but he put scorn of a woman's fear into his voice.

Ortega flashed the lantern slowly around the room. The light fingered the log chunk that was a stool. Moved to a rickety table. A rusty stove without any lid, ashes spilling through the broken teeth of the grate A battered agate pot with brown coffee foam smeared upon its lip. A spade bright and sharp from knowledge of the soil. Nothing more. The dirt floor was gummy where the water had soaked. Gummy but even. The Sheriff swore in a voice unnaturally loud.

Then, as if touched by an unseen hand, the floor slowly changed form. Quietly, gently, making no sound, the floor changed. In the center the outline of a grave appeared, sinking at first almost imperceptibly, then faster, faster. A hollow, not six by three, for Maria was a little woman.

"The water tells his secret," said Ortega in triumph.

He went to work with the spade. The widow shrank into the corner, her hand at her mouth. Alfredo's face was white as he held the lantern high. First came her clothes. He'd tumbled the pitiful handful of her clothes into the grave as if he would bury even the sight of the shabby cottons that once clothed her. The widow stumbled from the house when she saw the torn scarlet of the *chino poblano* skirt. Alfredo ran out and was sick among the ash trees. . . .

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"She won't mind being alone for a few hours longer," said the Sheriff. "Let's go, *amigos*."

A coyote howled not far away. He returned, closed the door tightly, and made a barricade of the spade and shovel across the open window.

They rode silently through the canyon. The moon had risen high and it cast their shadows across the wild grass as they emerged onto the mesa. Ortega reined in his horse until he rode close to the widow.

"How did you know?"

She drew a wilted wisp of weed from her skirt pocket and put it in his hand. "Last summer Maria took me to the *ranchito*. It was the time of the *tunas*. They are thick along the canyon wall. I saw it then, growing green and rank in his secret garden. Maria made me promise I wouldn't tell. He'd beat her if he knew she'd taken me there. I promised. When Alfredo brought home the stalk from the horse's stirrup, it was suddenly clear in my mind — where he'd hidden the horse, where he'd buried Maria."

"Marihuana," said the Sheriff, "so that's where Polvo Rojo gets its supply. Zamorra must have made a pretty penny from his secret garden. You should have told me."

"*En boca cerrada no entran moscas*," she murmured. "My mother taught me that saying well — A closed mouth catches no flies, *Señor*. Zamorra's a bad man, very bad. I was afraid for Maria. I was afraid for me."

"A close-mouthed woman and wise," his hand was warm and companionable on her bare arm.

"But you are wiser," the widow's leg touched his softly as their horses drew closer. "I would never have thought of the water."

"The water trick?" He laughed. "I learned that from my Apache grandfather years ago."

Alfredo spurred his mule into a trot and was soon far ahead. But Ortega and the widow took their time. What lay behind them was in no hurry. Zamorra waited unsuspecting ahead.

"A good job well done, Sheriff," said the District Attorney the next morning. "This will do you no harm, no harm at all, with election coming up. You're a smart man, Ortega."

"A smart man, Sheriff," said Viramontes after the District Attorney left the office. He grinned and counted on his fingers. "Give them a few years to grow and you'll have five, ten, thirteen good votes in your own family, no, *mi hombre?*"

Ortega gave his deputy a swift poke in his fat stomach and left him doubled up, half in pain, half in laughter. Outside, the Sheriff heard through the jailhouse window the shrill curses of Zamorra. Then they were drowned out. It was Chopo singing of the girl at El Elefante Blanco. Whistling the tune between his teeth, Ortega rode, his head filled with the thought of the chicken *mole* the widow had promised him for Sunday dinner — and of other delectable things . . .

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IN THE DARK

by EDITH NESBIT

IT MAY BE THAT IT WAS A FORM OF madness. Or it may be that he really was what is called haunted. Or it may — though I don't pretend to understand how — have been the development, through intense suffering, of a sixth sense in a very nervous, highly-strung nature. Something certainly led him where They were. And to him They were all one.

He told me the first part of the story, and the last part of it I saw with my own eyes. . . .

Haldane and I were friends even in our schooldays. What first brought us together was our common hatred of Visger. He came from our part of the country, and his people knew our people at home, so he was put on to us when he came. He was the most intolerable person, boy and man, that I have ever known. He would not tell a lie. And that is all right, of course. But he didn't stop at that. If he were asked whether any other chap had done anything — been out of bounds, or up to any sort of lark — he would always say: "I don't know, sir, but I believe so." He never did know — we took care of that. But what he believed was always right. I remember Haldane twisting his arm to make him say how he knew about that cherry-tree business, and he only said: "I didn't know — I just felt sure. And I was right, you see." What can you do with a boy like that?

We grew up to be men. At least, Haldane and I did. Visger grew up to be a prig — but he wasn't a common prig. He knew all sorts of things that he oughtn't to have known, that he *couldn't* have known in any ordinary decent way. It wasn't that he found things out. He just *knew* them. Once when I was very unhappy he came into my rooms — we were all in our last year at Oxford — and talked about things I hardly knew myself. That was really why I went to India that winter. It was bad enough to be unhappy without having that beast knowing all about it.

I was away over a year. Coming back I thought a lot about how jolly it would be to see old Haldane again. If I thought about Visger at all, I wished he was dead. But I didn't think about him much.

I did want to see Haldane. He was always such a jolly chap — gay and kindly and simple, honorable, upright, and full of practical sympathies. I longed to see him, to see the smile in his jolly blue eyes looking out from the net of wrinkles that laughing had made round them, to hear his jolly laugh, and feel the good grip of his big hand. I went straight from the docks to his chambers in Gray's Inn, and I found him cold, pale, anemic, with dull eyes and a limp hand, and

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pale lips that smiled without mirth and uttered a welcome without gladness.

He was surrounded by a litter of disordered furniture and personal effects half-packed. Some big boxes stood corded, and there were cases of books filled and waiting for the enclosing boards to be nailed on.

"Yes, I'm moving," he said. "I can't stand these rooms. There's something rum about them — something devilish rum. I clear out tomorrow."

The autumn dusk was filling the corners with shadows. "You got the furs," I said, just for something to say, for I saw the big case that had held them lying corded among the others.

"Furs?" he said. "Oh, yes. Thanks, awfully. Yes. I forgot about the furs." He laughed, out of politeness, I suppose, for there was no joke about the furs. They were many and fine — the best I could get for money, and I had seen them packed and sent off when my heart was very sore. He stood looking at me, and saying nothing.

"Come out and have a bit of dinner," I said, as cheerfully as I could.

"Too busy," he answered, after the slightest possible pause and a glance round the room. "Look here — I'm awfully glad to see you. If you'd just slip over and order in dinner — I'd go myself — only — well, you see how it is."

I went. And when I came back he had cleared a space near the fire and moved his big gate-table into it. We dined there by candlelight. I tried to be amusing. He, I am sure, tried to be amused. We did not succeed, either of us. And his haggard eyes watched me all the time, save in those fleeting moments when, without turning his head, he glanced back over his shoulder into the shadows that crowded round the little lighted place where we sat.

When we had dined, and the man had come and taken away the dishes, I looked at him very steadily, so that he stopped in a pointless anecdote and looked interrogation at me.

"Well?" I said.

"You're not listening," he said, petulantly. "What's the matter?"

"That's what you'd better tell me," I said.

He was silent — gave one of those furtive glances at the shadows, and stooped to stir the fire to a blaze that must light every corner of the room.

"You're all to pieces," I said, cheerfully. "What have you been up to — whiskey, bridge, Stock Exchange? If you won't tell me you'll have to tell your doctor. Why, my dear chap, you're a nervous wreck."

"You're a comfortable friend to have about the place," he said, and smiled a mechanical smile not at all pleasant to see.

"I'm the friend you want, I think," said I. "Do you suppose I'm blind? Something's gone wrong and you've taken to something — morphia, perhaps. And you've brooded over the

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thing till you've lost all sense of proportion. Out with it, old chap! Bet you half a dollar it's not so bad as you think it."

"If I could tell you — or tell anyone," he said, slowly, "it wouldn't be so bad. If I could tell anyone I'd tell you. And even as it is, I've told you more than I've told anyone else."

I could get nothing more out of him. But he pressed me to stay — would have given me his bed and made himself a shake-down, he said. But I had engaged my room at the Victoria, and I was expecting letters. So I left him, quite late, and he stood on the stairs holding a candle over the banisters to light me down.

When I went back next morning he was gone. Men were moving his furniture into a long van with Somebody's Pantechnicon painted on it in big letters.

He had left no address with the porter, and had driven off in a cab with two portmanteaux — to Waterloo, the porter thought.

Well, a man has a right to the monopoly of his own troubles if he chooses. And my letters had taught me that I had troubles of my own to keep me busy.

It was more than a year later that I saw Haldane again. I had got rooms in the Albany by this time, and he turned up there one morning, very early indeed — before breakfast, in fact. And if he had looked ghastly before, he now looked almost ghostly. His face looked as though it had *worn* thin, like an oyster-shell that has for years been cast up twice a day by the sea on a shore all pebbly. His hands were thin as a bird's claws, and they trembled like caught butterflies.

I welcomed him with enthusiastic cordiality and pressed breakfast on him. This time, I decided, I would ask no questions. For I saw that none were needed. He would tell me. He intended to tell me. He had come here to tell me, and for nothing else.

I made coffee and small talk for him, and I ate and drank and waited for him to begin. And it was like this that he began.

"I am going," he said, "to kill myself — oh, don't be alarmed" — I suppose I had said or looked something — "I won't do it here, or now. I shall do it when I have to — when I can't bear it any longer. And I want someone to know why. I don't want to feel that I'm the only soul that does know. And I can trust you, can't I?"

I murmured something reassuring.

"I should like you, if you don't mind, to give me your word that you won't tell anyone at all what I'm going to tell you, as long as I'm alive. Afterwards — you can tell whom you please."

I gave him my word.

He sat silent, looking at the fire. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"It's extraordinary how difficult it is to say it," he said, and smiled. "The fact is — you know that beast George Visger?"

"Yes," I said. "I haven't seen him since I came back. Someone told me

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he'd gone to some island or other to preach to the cannibals. Anyhow, he's out of the way, bad luck to him."

"Yes," said Haldane, "he's out of the way. But he's not preaching anything. In point of fact, he's dead."

"Dead?" was all I could think of to say.

"Yes," said he; "it's not generally known, but he is."

"What did he die of?" I asked, not that I cared. The bare fact was good enough for me.

"You know what an interfering chap he always was. Always knew everything. Heart-to-heart talks, and have everything open and aboveboard. Well, he interfered between me and someone else — told her a pack of lies."

"Lies?"

"Well, the *things* were true, but he made lies of them the way he told them — *you* know." I did. I nodded. "And she threw me over. And she died. And we weren't even friends. I couldn't see her — before — I couldn't even —— Oh, my God! But I went to the funeral. He was there. They'd asked *him*. And then I came back to my rooms. And I was sitting there, thinking. And he came up."

"He would do that. It's just what he would do. I hope you kicked him out?"

"No, I didn't. I listened to what he had to say. He came to say no doubt it was all for the best. And he hadn't known the things he told her. He'd only guessed. He'd guessed right, curse him — like he used to at school, remember? What right had he to guess right? And he said it was all for the best, because besides that there was madness in my family. He'd found that out too ——"

"And is there?"

"If there is I didn't know it. And that was why it was all for the best. So then I said, 'There wasn't any madness in my family before; but there is now,' and I got hold of his throat. I am not sure whether I meant to kill him. I ought to have meant to kill him. Anyhow I did kill him. What did you say?"

I had said nothing. It is not easy to think at once of the tactful and suitable thing to say when your old friend tells you that he is a murderer.

"When I could get my hands out of his throat, he was there in a lump on the hearthrug. And I saw what I'd done. How is it that murderers ever get found out?"

"They're careless sometimes, I suppose," I found myself saying. "They lose their nerve."

"I didn't," he said. "I never was calmer. I sat down in the big chair and looked at him and thought it all out. He was just off to that island — I knew that. He'd said goodbye to everyone. He'd *told* me that. There was no blood to get rid of — or only just a touch at the corner of his slack mouth. He wasn't going to travel in his own name because of interviewers. Mr. Somebody Something's luggage would be unclaimed and his cabin empty. No one would guess that Mr.

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Somebody Something was Sir George Visger, Baronet. It was all as plain as plain. There was nothing to get rid of but the man — no weapon, no blood. And I got rid of him all right."

"How?"

He smiled cunningly.

"No, no," he said, "that's where I draw the line. It's not that I doubt your word, but if you talked in your sleep, or had a fever or anything . . . No, no. As long as you don't know where the body is, don't you see, I'm all right. Even if you could prove that I've said all this, which you can't — it's only the wanderings of my poor unhinged brain. See?"

I saw. And I was very sorry for him. And I did not believe that he had killed Visger. He was not the sort of man who kills people. So I said: "Yes, old chap. I see. Now, look here. Let you and me go away together — travel a bit and see the world, and forget all about that beastly chap."

His eyes lighted up at that.

"Why," he said, "you understand! You don't hate me and shrink from me. I wish I'd told you before — you know — when you came and I was packing up my sticks. But it's too late now."

"Too late? Not a bit of it," I said. "Come, we'll pack right away and be off tonight — out into the unknown."

"That's where *I'm* going," he said. "You wait. When you've heard what's been happening to me you won't be so keen to go into the unknown with me."

"But you've told me what's been happening to you," I said. And the more I thought about what he had told me the less I believed it.

"No," he said, slowly, "no; I've told you what happened to *him*. What happened to me is quite different. Did I tell you what his last words were? Just when I was coming at him — before I'd got his throat, you know — he said, 'Look out! You'll never be able to get rid of the body. Besides, anger's sinful.' You know that way he had, like a tract on its hind legs? So afterwards I got thinking of that. But I didn't think of it for a year, because I did get rid of his body all right. And then I was sitting in that comfortable chair, and I thought, 'Hullo, it must be about a year now since that ——' and I pulled out my pocketbook and went to the window to look at a little almanac I carry about — it was getting dusk — and sure enough it was a year to the day. And then I remembered what he'd said, and I said to myself, 'Not much trouble about getting rid of *your* body, you brute.' And then I looked at the hearthrug, and —— Ah!" he screamed, suddenly and very loud, "I can't tell you — no, I can't!"

My man opened the door. He wore a smooth face over his wriggling curiosity. "Did you call, sir?"

"Yes," I lied. "I want you to take a note to the bank and wait for an answer."

When he was got rid of, Haldane said: "Where was I?"

"You were just telling me what

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happened after you looked at the almanac. What was it?"

"Nothing much," he said, laughing softly; "oh, nothing much — only that I glanced at the floor; and there *he* was, the man I'd killed a year before. Don't try to explain, or I shall lose my temper. The door was shut. The windows were shut. He hadn't been there a minute before. And he was there then. That's all."

Hallucination was one of the words I stumbled among.

"Exactly what I thought," he said, triumphantly; "but — I touched it. It was quite real. Heavy, you know, and harder than live people are, somehow, to the touch — more like a stone thing covered with kid the hands were, and the arms like a marble statue in a blue serge suit. Don't you hate men who wear blue serge suits?"

"There are hallucinations of touch, too," I found myself saying.

"Exactly what I thought," said Haldane, even more triumphant; "but there are limits, you know — limits. So then I thought someone had got him out — the real him — and stuck him there to frighten me while my back was turned, and I went to the place where I'd hidden him, and he was there — ah — just as I'd left him. Only — it was a year ago. There are two of him there now."

"My dear chap," I said, "this is simply comic."

"Yes," said he, "it *is* amusing. I find it so myself. Especially in the night when I wake up and think of it. I hope I don't die in the dark, Winston. That's one of the reasons why I think I shall have to kill myself. I could be sure then of not dying in the dark."

"Is *that* all?" I asked, feeling sure that it must be.

"No," said Haldane at once; "that's *not* all. He's come back to me again. In a railway carriage it was. I'd been asleep. When I woke up there he was, lying on the seat opposite me. Looked just the same. Felt just the same. I pitched him out on the line in Red Hill Tunnel. And if I see him again I'm going out myself. I can't stand it. It's too much. I'd sooner go. Whatever the next world's like, there aren't things like that. We leave them here, in graves and boxes, and . . . You think I'm mad, but I'm not. You can't help me — no one can help me. He *knew*, you see. He said I shouldn't be able to get rid of the body. And I can't get rid of it. I can't; I can't. He knew. He always did know things that he *couldn't* know. But I'll cut his game short. After all I've got the ace of trumps, and I play it on his next trick. I give you my word of honor, Winston, that I'm not mad."

"My dear man," I said, "I don't think you're mad. But I do think your nerves are upset. Mine are a bit, too. Do you know why I went to India? It was because of you and her. I couldn't stay and see it, though I wished for your happiness and all that, you know I did. And when I came back she — and you —— Let's see it out together," I said. "You

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won't keep fancying things if you've got me to talk to. And I always said you weren't a half-bad old duffer."

"She liked you," he said.

"Oh, yes," I said, "she liked me."

So that was how we came to go abroad together.

I was full of hope for him. He'd always been such a splendid chap — so sane, and strong. I couldn't believe that he had gone mad — gone forever, I mean, so that he'd never come right again. Perhaps my own trouble made it easy for me to see things not quite straight. Anyhow, I took him away to recover his mind's health, exactly as I should have taken him away to get strong after a fever. And the madness seemed to pass away, and in a month or two we were pretty jolly, and I thought I had cured him. And I was very glad because of that old friendliness of ours, and because she had loved him and liked me.

We never spoke of Visger. I thought he had forgotten all about him. I thought I understood how his mind, overstrained by sorrow and anger, had fixed on the man he hated and woven a nightmare web of horror round that detestable personality. And I had got the whip-hand of my own trouble. And we were as jolly as sandboys — soberish sandboys — together all those months.

And we came to Bruges at last in our travels, and Bruges was very full because of the exhibition. We could only get one room and one bed, so we tossed for the bed, and the one who lost the toss was to make the best of the night in an armchair. And the bed-clothes we were to share equitably.

We spent the evening at a *cafe chantant* and finished at a beer hall, and it was late and we were sleepy when we got back to the Big Vine. I took our key from its nail in the concierge's room, and we went up. We talked for a bit, I remember, about the town and the belfry and the Venetian aspect of the canals by moonlight, and then Haldane got into bed and I made a chrysalis of myself with my share of the blankets, and fitted the tight roll into the armchair. I was not at all comfortable, but I was compensatingly tired, and I was nearly asleep when Haldane roused me up to tell me about his will.

"I've left everything to you, old man," he said. "I know I can trust you to see to everything."

"Quite so," said I; "and, if you don't mind, we'll talk about it in the morning."

He tried to go on about it, and about what a friend I'd been, and all that; but I shut him up and told him to go to sleep. But no. He wasn't comfortable, he said; and he'd got a thirst like a lime-kiln. And he'd noticed that there was no water bottle in the room. "And the water in the jug's like pale soup," he said.

"Oh, all right," said I. "Light your candle and go and get some water, then, in Heaven's name, and let me get to sleep!"

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But he said, "No — you light it. I don't want to get out of bed in the dark. I might — I might step on something, mightn't I — or walk into something that wasn't there when I got into bed?"

"Rot!" I said; "walk into your grandmother!" But I lit the candle all the same. He sat up in bed, looking at me — very pale — with his hair all tumbled from the pillow and his eyes blinking and shining.

"That's better," he said. And then, "I say — look here. Oh — yes — I see. It's all right. Queer how they mark the sheets here. Blessed if I didn't think it was blood, just for the minute."

The sheet was marked, not at the corner, as sheets are marked at home, but right in the middle where it it turns down, with big red cross-stitches.

"Yes, I see," I said; "it is a queer place to mark it."

"It's queer letters to have on it," he said. "G. V."

"Grande Vigne," I said. "What letters do you expect them to mark things with? Hurry up."

"You come too," he said. "Yes, it does stand for Grand Vigne, of course. I wish you'd come down too, Winston."

"I'll *go* down," I said, and turned with the candle in my hand.

He was out of bed and close to me in a flash. "No," said he, "I don't want to stay alone in the dark."

He said it just as a frightened child might have done.

"All right, then, come along," I said. And we went. I tried to make some joke, I remember, about the length of his hair and the cut of his pajamas — but I was sick with disappointment. For it was quite plain to me, even then, that all my time and trouble had been thrown away, and that he wasn't cured after all.

We went down as quietly as we could, and got a carafe of water from the long bare dining-table in the *salle à manger*. He got hold of my arm at first, and then he got the candle away from me and went very slowly, shading the light with his hand and looking very carefully all about, as though he expected to see something that he wanted desperately not to see. And, of course, I knew what that something was. I didn't like the way he was going on. I can't at all express how deeply I didn't like it. And he looked over his shoulder every now and then, just as he did that first evening after I had come back from India.

The thing got on my nerves so that I could hardly find the way back to our room. And when we got there I give you my word I more than half expected to see what *he* expected to see — that, or something like it, on the hearthrug. But, of course, there was nothing.

I blew out the light and tightened my blankets round me — I'd been trailing them after me in our expedition. And I was feeling for my chair when Haldane spoke.

"You've got all the blankets," he said.

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"No, I haven't," said I; "only what I've always had."

"I can't find mine, then," he said, and I could hear his teeth chattering. "And I'm cold. I'm —— For God's sake, light the candle! Light it! Light it! Something horrible ——"

But I couldn't find the matches.

"Light the candle — light the candle!" he said, and his voice broke, as a boy's does sometimes in chapel. "If you don't he'll come to me. It is so easy to come at anyone in the dark. Oh, Winston, light the candle, for the love of God, *I can't die in the dark!*"

"I am lighting it," I said, savagely, and I was feeling for the matches on the marble-topped chest of drawers, on the mantelpiece — everywhere but on the round centre-table where I had put them.

He said, "It's cold. It's cold. It's cold," like that, three times. And then he screamed aloud, like a woman, like a child, like a hare when the dogs have got it.

"What is it?" I cried, hardly less aloud. "For God's sake, what is it?"

There was an empty silence. Then, very slowly:

"It's Visger," he said. And he spoke thickly, as through some stifling veil.

"Nonsense. Where?" I asked, and my hand closed on the matches.

"Here!" he screamed, sharply, as though he had torn the veil away, "here! Beside me. *In the bed.*"

I got the candle lit. I got across to him.

He was crushed in a heap at the edge of the bed. Stretched on the bed beside him was a dead man, very white and cold.

Haldane had died in the dark.

It was all so simple.

We had come to the wrong room. The man the room belonged to was there, on the bed he had engaged and paid for before he died of a heart attack, earlier in the day. A French *commis voyageur* representing soap and perfumery: his name, Leblanc.

Later, in England, I made cautious inquiries. The body of a man had been found in the Red Hill Tunnel — a haberdasher named Simmons, who had drunk some poison, owing to the depression of trade. The bottle was clutched in his dead hand.

For reasons that I had, I took care to have a police inspector with me when I opened the boxes that came to me by Haldane's will. One of them was the big box, metal-lined, in which I had sent him the furs from India — for a wedding present, God help us all!

It was closely soldered.

Inside were the skins of beasts — and the bodies of two men. One was identified after some trouble as that of a hawker of pens in City offices — subject to fits. He had died in one, it seemed. The other body was Visger's.

Explain it as you like. I offered you, if you remember, a choice of explanations before I began this story. I have not yet found the explanation that satisfies me.

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

". . . tale of very delicate texture and a worthy companion for the three distinguished mysteries that have preceded it." (JS)	"Striking picture of local politics . . . Thoughtful and extremely well-written. Superior." (AdV)	
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KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in her syndicated column*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in the Saturday Review of Literature*

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Los Angeles Daily News*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*

JS: *James Sandoe in the New York Herald Tribune*

AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

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C.I.D. (Caliph in Disguise)

Now that Inspector Chafik of the Iraqi Criminal Investigation Department has become an established member of EQMM's Round Table, and will continue to be so, we feel that you should know something about his creator and origins . . . in 1939 Charles B. Child began six and a half years of military service which included three years with British counter-intelligence in the Middle East. He was stationed in Baghdad, and his work took him on long tours through Iraq, Kurdistan, and Persia. By September 1946, Mr. Child had returned to the United States ("an old love of his pre-war travels") and was living in Connecticut. It was in that month of that year that Inspector Chafik J. Chafik was born. Mr. Child, seeking a new character for his magazine writing, hit upon the irresistible idea of a Middle Eastern detective, against the colorful background of modern Baghdad. He remembered vividly the people in Iraq with whom he had had contact during his own "police" work, and from these composite recollections emerged Inspector Chafik, the C.I.D. officer with the card-index mind, who embodies all the fine qualities of the educated man of Iraq. Perhaps the most specific source was Mr. Child's war-time interpreter, a young man who, on the hottest days, would remain cool and unruffled, and write, speak, and advise in whatever Middle Eastern language Mr. Child required, and who seemed to possess the very filing-card memory which Mr. Child visualized as Inspector Chafik's remarkable attribute. To this, Mr. Child added compassion and profound pity, and certain professional traits of the Iraqi police, particularly their patience, their humor, and their quiet bulldoggedness.

As for Sergeant Abdullah — well, it is most difficult, if not downright impossible, to avoid a "Dr. Watson." When Inspector Chafik first spoke on Mr. Child's typewriter, Abdullah answered, naturally and inevitably, with a polite "By grace of God." And having pushed his way so reverently into the first story, Sergeant Abdullah remained — the always welcome familiar of the detective, whose prototype was born on that day in 1841 when the first familiar chronicled the earliest exploit of Chevalier Auguste Dupin, and who was revived so magnificently on another day, in 1887, when a cer-

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tain Dr. Watson first blundered on the literary scene and so completely won the hearts of millions of people that his name has become a permanent part of the English language.

So, now dip once more into the fascinating adventures of Inspector Chafik of the Baghdad C.I.D. and his ever-present companion-in-criminology, the unobtrusive Sergeant Abdullah . . .

DEATH HAD A VOICE

by CHARLES B. CHILD

RUMOR, BORN AS A BREATH IN THE maze of alleyways surrounding the holy mosque of Kadimain, gathered mischief as the desert wind gathers dust. It choked reason, blinded tolerance and whipped up fury in the mob that cried havoc through the shabby, dun-colored streets of the city of Baghdad.

The components of the mob were ragged, underfed men bred on the dirty body of a hate-racked world. Individually they were pitiful. Collectively they were terrible. They were armed with knives, sticks, fragments of stone; but the worst weapons of all were their brown, clawed hands. Cloaked by the darkness of an oppressively hot night, the men ran; and like all mobs, this one did not know where it was going, or why.

On the outskirts of the Bab-al-Sheik district were the police. The white tunics of the metropolitan officers were smudged chalk lines drawn across the main roads, and in the side streets lurked khaki-clad troopers of the suburban patrols, mounted on well-trained horses. Behind, were motorized squadrons of mobile police, heavily armed with rifles and machine guns, prepared to drive forward into the heart of the mob if the clubs and reversed carbines of the forward lines failed to force it back.

A dapper little man drove up in an open touring car, surveyed the preparations and nodded approval. He was dressed in a lightweight civilian suit of good cut, and wore on his sleek head the black *sidarah* of the modern Iraqi. He had a sharp chin and rather full lips; his eyes were large, mottled olive in color, and strangely flat. He was representative of a people whose beginning was veiled by the mists of history, and he looked at the mob cynically, seeing it as the rot in the timbers of a neglected civilization.

He said in Arabic to his companion, a gaunt man in the uniform of a sergeant of police, "One smells their hate. Have you not noticed, my dear Abdullah, that each human passion has a distinctive odor?"

Sergeant Abdullah replied, "Sir,

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I have sometimes smelled fear —"

"Fear and hatred are twins." Inspector Chafik of the Criminal Investigation Department lighted a cigarette and blew gently on the smoldering end to make it burn evenly. Looking at the mob, he went on, "I pity these foolish people whose heads we are about to crack. They are not our enemies."

The swarthy face of the sergeant darkened and he made a gesture of protest. "Permit me, sir, to observe that these men break the law, and therefore —"

"A doctor," said Chafik smoothly, "does not consider his patient an enemy. He wages his war against the cause of the complaint. And mob madness is equally a sickness." He drew on his cigarette and then went on in a voice of iron, "There is direction behind this riot. It is a cancer, and I intend to cut it out."

The little man stood up in the open car as the space between the mob and the police barrier closed. The senseless howling had died away, and it seemed for a moment that the orderly lines of uniformed men might act as a sedative, that tactful handling would disperse the crowd.

Then, somewhere in the background, a voice raised the ancient battle cry of the Jehid, "*Thibhahum besm er rassoul!*"

The voice had the high pitch and wailing note of the fanatic, but it also carried authority. It probed to the nerves, and with that one cry destroyed the salutary effect of the massed police. When it came again, "Kill in the Prophet's name!" the mob echoed the words and launched a volley of stones.

The police came into action, but above the thud of their sticks, the cries of pain, the shouts of anger, the voice could still be heard. Sometimes it came from the front of the crowd, then again from the flanks; the darkness and confusion made it impossible to trace the source. The mob attacked with such fury that the police barrier was pushed back, and now it was the turn of the troopers. They drove wedges through the packed ranks of fanatics, and struck hammer blows with the brass heelplates of their carbines while their skillful horses backed and sidled.

But still there was the voice, "*Thibhahum besm er rassoul! Thibhahum!*"

Inspector Chafik said bitterly, "Hashish would have a less maddening effect. We have now heard our enemy." He turned to a squad of mobile police. "Bring me that man who blasphemes the Prophet!" he ordered, and then beat his hands together in sharp despair as he heard the voice again, but this time from a distance.

Whoever the man was, he realized the mob was fighting a losing battle. He fled now for safety, a vampire satiated for this night, leaving behind the dead, the injured — and what was worse, the cancerous hate.

Chief Inspector Ellsworth, appointed head of the Baghdad C.I.D.

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by the Iraqi government, sat at his desk on the second floor of the headquarters building on Al-Rashid Street, reports of the night's events spread before him. He was a burly, red-faced Englishman, whose thick brows joined in a bar across his forehead and accentuated the sharpness of his eyes.

He said brusquely, "Fifteen dead, 83 injured. A lot of looting. Only 30 arrests, and those unimportant. This is a hell of a poor show, Chafik."

The little man, who was perched on the edge of a chair, moved uncomfortably. He told himself he had no reason to fear the chief inspector, but his hands were clammy. He was aware he had spoken ingratiatingly upon entering the office, and self-anger surged to his normally cool head. He began adjusting his neat polka-dot tie to hide it.

Ellsworth said irritably, "Leave that damn' tie alone! . . . What d'you think was behind this riot, Chafik?"

"Sir, I would say that its sole purpose was to foment hatred." His English was precise.

"For political reasons?" The chief inspector's eyebrows worked vigorously.

Chafik twisted the folded *sidarah* between his slender hands, and answered in the peculiar hollow voice of a man who spoke thoughts, "Hatred breeds hatred. Arabs rise against Jews, and Jews against Arabs. In India the Moslems and Hindus destroy one another. It is also this way in Europe and elsewhere. There is a plague of fear and suspicion in the world that makes each religious and political group see the other as a mad dog —"

Ellsworth interrupted, "Dammit, I don't want to hear a lecture."

The little man gave a nervous smile. "Please excuse me." Then he said with unexpected firmness, "I am a policeman and a servant of the public. In politics I must practice celibacy. Therefore I do not wish to consider the reason for the riot. But it is my duty to arrest the man who directly instigated it."

"You mean this man with the voice?" asked the chief inspector, looking at Chafik's report.

"Yes, sir. I am convinced he was paid to do what he did, in the same way an assassin is paid. The dead are his victims as surely as if he had struck them down with a knife. Perhaps we cannot touch the people who paid him — they may be outside this country — but he should hang."

The iron was back in his voice, and the Englishman looked at him curiously, thinking: He's a fanatic, too. He'd give his life for the cause of law and order. Aloud, Ellsworth said, "Is there any clue to this man's identity?"

Chafik spread his hands, and the light which had briefly given color to his eyes began to fade. "The prisoners have been interrogated. Some describe the agitator as a tall man, others as a short man. He is also definitely identified as being both fat and lean —"

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"In other words an average man. We might just as well try to pick one pea out of a bushel." Ellsworth rammed tobacco into his pipe with a vigorous thumb. "What about probables?"

"Investigations proceed, but I have already eliminated the majority of professional agitators on our records." Chafik paused and then added, "But a clever man would not be on our records, and this one may be a stranger."

"So you look for a man of average appearance who may or may not be Iraqi! What a hope!"

"Sir, I am not without hope. I have closed the gates of Baghdad, and am confident the man now lurks like a rat in some dark hole. I shall drive him out." Ellsworth looked skeptical, and Chafik added, "It is true I did not see his face, but I heard his voice —"

The chief inspector put his hands on the desk and looked at the little man through the smoke of his pipe. He saw him as a terrier, quivering with the excitement of the hunt, and wisely refrained from asking how Chafik expected to recognize a voice briefly heard in the confusion of a riot. Instead, he said gruffly, "Better not tell me your plans. You're so damn' unorthodox. . . . All right."

It was dismissal, and the Iraqi salaamed with the tips of curved fingers hovering near his forehead. When he had closed the door behind him he stopped and carefully adjusted his tie with a gesture of self-assertion. "Unorthodox! Unorthodox!" he repeated harshly. "What this Englishman means is that he does not wish to offend his official conscience by hearing what I may do." Chafik gratefully inhaled the acrid smoke of his Kurdish cigarette as he walked to his own office in the building.

The room was furnished with a desk and a few chairs; a row of filing cabinets stood against one wall, and on the other was a map of Baghdad. It was an excessively tidy room, but Chafik frowned and moved the telephone to an angle that squared with his "in" tray before he sat down. When he touched the bell, Sergeant Abdullah appeared with the readiness of a jinni. He said, "I have the honor to give you the final list of agents who specialize in riots —"

Chafik said, "That is not an honor. They are all sons of Judas." He read the list carefully, then threw it down and wiped his hands as though they had been contaminated. "This does not help us," he told his assistant. "There is only one way to find the man who cried, 'Kill in the Prophet's name.' Are the rioters who were arrested still in the building?"

"We have just finished interrogating, sir. But I regret to report —"

"A negative report is of no value." The little man got up and paced the room, but presently he stopped and remarked conversationally, "Of course there is a certain risk . . ." He flushed with anger at the sound of his voice speaking the thought, and said sharply, "Each man is to be brought to me. He will shout, '*Thibhahum besm er*

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rassoul' as it was shouted last night."

Sergeant Abdullah put the palms of his hands together in a gesture of protest. "Sir, may I be permitted to express doubt that it will be possible to recognize —"

"You may not express anything."

Chafik stood at the window overlooking the yellow-brown city. The increasing heat of the day poured rivulets of sweat down his thin face, but he was unaware of discomfort.

He was absorbed by threads of thought that wove a strange and intricate pattern. But when the door opened and Sergeant Abdullah announced disapprovingly, "The first prisoner," he turned briskly.

They thrust into the room a man dressed in a dirty gown. His bare feet were caked with dust, and his oily hair straggled from under a wisp of turban. The man said in a frightened voice, "Kill in the Prophet's name —"

The Inspector lighted a cigarette. "You do not shout with enthusiasm," he said softly. "The voice that called for death to walk the streets of Baghdad did not whisper." He spoke to the escort consisting of two police officers: "Take him away and beat him so that he may learn to shout."

When the man was brought back ten minutes later, he screamed, "*Thibhahum besm er rassoul!*" in a voice that reverberated.

Chafik said, "That is an improvement, and now I know yours was not the voice I heard last night." He nodded to Sergeant Abdullah, who waited attentively. "Let this blasphemer go. He may consider the beating just punishment — And bring the next."

They followed one another at brief intervals. Some shouted defiantly, and all loudly because they feared the instructive sticks of the police. After each shout the little inspector said, "It is not the voice I heard. Let him go —"

At the end of two hours the door closed on the last man. The dreadful cry still seemed to echo in the room, and Chafik gently rubbed his ears as he left the window and went to his desk.

Sergeant Abdullah said sympathetically, "Your head aches, sir. It is a pity you were not rewarded. But it would indeed have been a coincidence."

"It would be even more remarkable if I could recognize the voice —"

"Sir?"

"You will now comb the brothels, the cafés, and the bazaars, and bring in every man who might have taken part in the riot to shout the same cry.

The sergeant put a brown hand to the collar of his tunic to ease its pressure around his choleric neck. He said hoarsely, "There are 400,000 people in Baghdad. To find the voice you may have to hear all of them. And you yourself have just said —"

Inspector Chafik opened a fresh packet of Ghazi cigarettes and bowed his sleek head as he offered one to his assistant. He said, "I do not intend to ask so many people to cry blasphemy

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in my already offended ear. That indeed would give me the madness you think afflicts me at this moment." His strange eyes became suddenly brilliant, and he added softly, "No, my dear Abdullah, I do not expect to find a voice I cannot recognize. I expect to find the man who owns it, to harass his nerves until they break."

"But, sir —"

"These men are even now telling the cafés of Baghdad that we seek a voice. And when perhaps for weeks, we continue today's test, what do you think will happen to the man who hides?"

Abdullah rapped knuckles against his head. "It is all wood up there," he said. "I had not perceived the plan. The man who shouted last night will fear that he may be brought in to face the test. Therefore, like a cornered beast, he will venture into the open to destroy that which makes him afraid —" The gaunt sergeant stopped.

Chafik said gently, "I see you are beginning to understand."

"You have made all Baghdad believe you alone can recognize the voice —"

Chafik made a sound of disapproval. "You are old-fashioned. Generals do not die in bed these days. Sometimes they even mount the scaffold. Make note, Abdullah. The man who shortly tries to kill me, or even succeeds, is the man wanted for last night's murders."

He took a manicure pad from his desk and began to polish his nails carefully. . . .

Five days later, Inspector Chafik, seated at his favorite table in the Swiss Café on Al-Rashid Street, announced to the waiter who served him with coffee and honey cakes, "A bullet of course would be preferable to a strangler's cord —" He did not realize he had spoken until he saw the man's startled look, and then shielded his confusion behind his newspaper.

Yes, he told himself, this time silently, and it would also be an excellent thing if nerves, like false teeth, could be detached during periods of discomfort . . .

He lowered his newspaper and watched a stranger searching for a table. These days, Chafik acknowledged, he was suspicious of strangers, and when in a public place he always chose a chair backed by a wall. The condition of his nerves shocked him, excited him. If the hunter was affected this way, what of the hunted? The man who had cried death must be near breaking point.

The Inspector looked at his watch. The hour was seven-fifteen, and this was Thursday, the day and hour when he habitually attended the early performance at the Saa'dun Picture House. Chafik was satisfied his habits were well enough known to shape the plans of an assassin; it was essential he should not change them. The feature at the Saa'dun was a detective film, his dearest form of relaxation, but he doubted he would relax this night.

When he stood up he saw one of his own men peering through the plate-

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glass window of the café. He had not asked for a bodyguard, and shrewdly guessed that Sergeant Abdullah had acted on his own initiative.

The plain-clothes man had disappeared by the time he reached the door, and he looked suspiciously up and down the street. All he could see was a beggar-woman crouching against one of the pillars of the arcade. She held up a baby clad in rags, shaking it for his attention until the bracelets on her arms jangled noisily. "Be merciful," she moaned. "See the belly of my child!" but the preoccupied little man let the fumbled coins fall back into his pocket and hurried to cross the road.

It was a hot and airless night. Fine sand, carried from the southern desert by recent winds, was suspended like mist above the city. It sank gradually as it absorbed moisture, and gave people and objects an unreal appearance. The Inspector, however, did not fail to see an elongated shadow in a doorway near the theater, and he said conversationally to the surprised attendant at the box office, "The gauntness of the good Abdullah cannot be effectively disguised —" Taking his ticket, he chose a corner box and lowered himself into an armchair.

As he anticipated, he could not find his usual enjoyment in the lush screen world of corpses and clues. Nor could he relax; not only because of his taut nerves, but because he was plagued by something not done.

He retraced the events of the day. Then, to the annoyance of a gentleman who occupied one of the other chairs in the box, he said, "The thing is traceable to the café. Did I forget to tip the waiter?"

His chance companion said, "I think you mistake me for somebody else —"

"It was not the waiter." Chafik stared at the other man, but did not see him. "I remember now. A woman asked for alms and I did not give them to her."

"The giving of alms is blessed," said the stranger. "But so is silence in the cinema. I must request —"

"I have always given alms. The crux of the matter is undoubtedly there." He was silent for a moment and then beat the arms of his chair and rose to his feet. "I have it!" he announced. "I was controlled by my subconscious —" This time he heard his voice and was grateful for the darkness as he stumbled out.

Leaving the theater by the fire exit at the rear, he walked up an alleyway to Al-Rashid Street, keeping an alert eye for Sergeant Abdullah. When the familiar figure emerged from the murk, he pressed himself to the wall.

Chafik was touched by his assistant's devotion, but he thought: This sets a false value on my life . . . and as Abdullah stopped outside the Saa'dun and made a pretense of examining the posters, the Inspector slipped across the road.

It was the Inspector's habit on the nights when he went to the pictures to complete the evening with another visit to the café. He walked quickly, his footsteps muffled by the carpet of

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sand which now covered the road. The windows of the café threw a haze of bluish light. A shapeless bundle against the wall began to stir as he hurried by.

Opening the door, he said loudly to the proprietor who sat at the cash register, "I am early because the picture was not good. The hero had an inexhaustible hip flask and was still drinking when I left. I will take tea." He closed the door on the whining beggarwoman and went to his table.

Chafik lighted a cigarette and was annoyed because he broke the first match. When the waiter brought a glass of green tea, flavored with lemon, he sipped it carefully and wondered that the taste should be bitter. He had an uncontrollable desire to talk, but steadied himself by silently repeating the 113th sura of the Koran, which begins, "I take me for refuge to the Lord of the Daybreak."

After fifteen minutes, he looked at his watch. The program at the Saa'dun was almost over. He went to the desk and bought a telephone token and shut himself in the booth at the back of the room. Dialing the number of the theater, he called for the proprietor.

The little man said, "This is Chafik J. Chafik, C.I.D. Outside stands Sergeant Abdullah, who is known to you. Please call him." He stood waiting.

Abdullah said breathlessly when he came to the telephone, "Sir! I do not understand how — Where are you?"

"I will tell you presently. If I told you now you would rush to protect me, so first hear your instructions."

"I hear and obey," said the sergeant.

Chafik said, "I am arranging my departure from this place to coincide with your arrival. Something will doubtless happen when I step outside."

"In the name of the Compassionate and All-Merciful, be cautious!"

"On the contrary, my dear Abdullah, it is you who must proceed with caution if this experiment is to succeed. Move quietly. Do not take action until the proper moment. Hastiness would indeed distress me." His strange eyes were bright in the gloom of the box. "I am at the café."

Chafik waited two minutes. When he went out his step was firm, but the beating of his heart was painful. He stood in the doorway looking at Al-Rashid Street and noted that few people braved the choking sand. He saw the beggarwoman at the wall.

"Food for my son! Alms — alms!" The jangle of voice and bracelets was like a rasp on Chafik's strained nerves. She fumbled with the folds of her ragged *chadur* to expose the child.

Inspector Chafik took coins from his pocket and said gently, "The plea of a mother is not to be refused." He bent to offer the money, then released his held breath as he saw the small gun partly hidden by her garment.

The beggarwoman said in a voice husky with anger, "Turn and walk. My man desires to meet you." She rose with the child clutched under her left arm. "I follow you."

Chafik said, "Unfortunately for me it is customary for a man to walk in

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front of a woman." Then he said dryly, "It is done to protect her. In Western countries men are wiser and reverse the position." He made a little bow and walked slowly up the street.

They passed several people who were hurrying for shelter. The Inspector reflected that even if it were desirable to call for help, he could not escape a bullet. He had seen the gray in the woman's face; the down-dragged mouth, which twitched nervously; the hatred in her eyes. She was not unattractive, and with his usual detachment he wondered what had compelled her to become the partner of a man whose profession was death. "There is tragedy behind all this," he announced, reaching for a cigarette.

The voice behind him whispered, "Do not touch your pockets." Then the woman said, "Behind what is tragedy?"

"Behind you, Madame. You have intelligence and yet you serve murder."

"I do what my man wishes!" Chafik did not miss the defiant note, nor the catch in her voice when she said, "I do not care what I serve so long as he is with me —" He heard her bracelets rattle again and then she ordered, "Enter the next passage."

"The Impasse Batshat al-Kubra? You could not have chosen a better place. It ends with the river. The English translation is 'the Great Disaster' —"

"May the dogs of Hell tear your flesh!" The woman came nearer, and he stiffened as he felt the gun prod him.

They came to the head of the passage. On one side was the high wall of a house, on the other a fence which enclosed waste ground. The only sound was the soft gurgle of the Tigris.

Something moved near the wall, and a man stepped in front of the Inspector. He held a knife gripped so tightly that his arm vibrated like an overstrained wire.

Chafik said, "It would be courteous to introduce yourself. Shall I do it for you? My records are very complete. They mention a certain Syrian who specializes in agitations for foreign powers. There is no description of him, but it is known he is always accompanied by a woman, who was once an actress." He made a little bow and said in a very clear voice, "I am at your command, Mohammed Khadami. And at yours, Madame Zubayda. Those were your last aliases, I believe?"

"Kill him!" The woman drew back.

Chafik said sadly, "Madame, your sex should be a symbol of life, not death."

"Enough, thou!" Zubayda choked.

"Your man has savage instincts," continued the Inspector conversationally. "If your love was not an obsession, you could calm him. Indeed, if you had borne him children —"

"Will you kill him, Mohammed?" demanded the woman fiercely. "Has he not tortured us enough?"

Speaking for the first time, the man said, "Let him first have his wish and hear my voice." He threw back the

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cloak and exposed a face drawn with exhaustion and distorted with hate. He shouted, "Now hear my voice and let it echo in your ears as the fires burn you! *Thibhahum besm er rassoul! Thibhahum besm* —" With final shattering of nerves and reason, he screamed as he lunged with the knife.

Inspector Chafik's backward leap was stopped by the wall. He pressed against it, waiting, but his mind was still clear, and he thought: It was a successful experiment. The man is now quite mad. Khadami was still shouting in his dreadful voice, but as he was about to lunge again an explosion rocked the alleyway.

There were three shots in as many seconds, and the sound of bullets tearing into flesh made Chafik shudder. He saw the man who had cried death fall and clutch at his torn chest.

Sergeant Abdullah burst from the haze of dust, his heavy police pistol raised for another shot. Chafik said, "Do not waste ammunition. This man is keeping his appointment at Samarra . . . How rightly this is called the Place of the Great Disaster!" He turned swiftly and caught the wrist of the woman Zubayda, and with a dextrous twist made her drop her lifted gun. "Dream of vengeance later," he told her, and added not unkindly, "To soothe the last moments of your man would be an act of charity —"

Chafik reached into the darkness and picked up the bundled child, abandoned by the woman when they first entered the passage. As he rocked it gently, he heard Abdullah say, "Sir, my hand was mercifully steady. Visibility was exceptionally poor, and if you had not jumped away —"

"You came very quietly, Abdullah, and even I did not know you were there for certain. I sprang because I hoped." The little man felt suddenly weak and leaned against the wall. "There would have been no hope for me at all if this woman had been a better actress."

Zubayda rose. She said in an expressionless voice, "Mohammed has gone now, and as you are the hangman's procurator, that is for the best." Her mouth shaped with petulance, and when she asked, "How could I have been a better actress?" she was like a child who clung to the fantasy of a favorite doll in a bombed house.

Chafik said, "This is not yours." He held out the child, which was making mewing sounds of hunger.

"Not mine, no." The woman moved to take it, and then drew back.

"Obviously a mummer's prop," Chafik said in a harder voice. "Otherwise I would have walked blindly into your trap."

Zubayda said, "I do not understand you. I am a good actress. I know I am a good actress." She put her hands to her face and the bracelet slid down her brown arms.

"Madame!" Inspector Chafik struggled to keep sympathy out of his voice. "I knew you played a false part when I first saw you — a mother who begs for her starving child does not wear bangles."

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DEATH ON THE RIVIERA

by Q. PATRICK

SAY A NUMBER — PLEASE. YOU LOOK lucky, whoever you are."

The girl was suddenly there by Trant's side at the casino roulette table, holding up a single thousand-franc chip. She was English. He could tell that from her voice and from the clear, creamy skin which suggested spring woods and a nightingale singing somewhere. The trained policeman in him could also tell that, although she was being very cool about it, she was under an intense nervous strain.

Lieutenant Trant of the New York Homicide Bureau had come to France as one of a delegation of detectives to study police methods at the Paris Sûreté. Having stolen a week end in Cannes, he was in a mood for something pleasantly unorthodox.

He grinned at the girl. "Twenty-six," he said, guessing her age.

The croupier was croaking "*Rien ne va plus.*" The girl tossed the chip neatly onto 26. As the croupier flicked the little ball into the spinning wheel, her hand clutched Trant's sleeve. The ball rattled into the slot of Number 13.

"I'm sorry I jinxed you. I hope it wasn't a matter of life or death?"

The girl laughed. "Not of life, certainly."

"Of death then?"

She looked at him. "Possibly."

"Tell me."

Her dark eyes seemed to gauge his sincerity. "For all you know I'm just a wicked siren who hangs around casinos and lures men to their doom."

"I'll take a chance on doom to the extent of a drink."

He started to guide her past the chemin-de-fer table toward the bar, but she shied away. "No, not in here. There's only one exit from the Salle de Jeu. I — I feel trapped. Let's go where they're dancing."

They moved out into the broad lounge where couples were dancing an enthusiastic European samba. He let her choose their table, deep in a corner with a view of the entrance to the gambling rooms. He ordered drinks.

She said: "You're an American. One feels less self-conscious with Americans. They're so friendly." She twisted the stem of her brandy glass. She had small, pretty hands and beautiful arms, emerging rounded and faintly tanned from the short sleeves of her rose-pink blouse. She was Trant's type of girl.

"Perhaps," she murmured, "perhaps you could help me."

"Money?"

"Oh, no, no. It's not that. It's — I'm sorry to be such an idiot, but I've never been in a situation like this before. My husband . . ."

"Your husband . . . ?"

"He's just tried to murder me."

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She looked self-conscious and British. "Really, it's too embarrassing, but it happened. He's a Brazilian. Terribly rich and good family. All that. But, when he's been drinking, he gets madly primitive. Just because I went sailing today with a young Englishman I used to know, he got insanely jealous. We're living on our yacht down in the harbor. He chased me all around the cabin, screaming. Then he got his revolver. He pulled the trigger. He would have killed me. He really meant to. But luckily it wasn't loaded and before he could find the bullets, I managed to escape."

Trant asked: "When was this?"

"Just a few minutes ago. I ran right here because I thought I'd be safe."

"And the thousand-franc chip?"

She shrugged. "I was frightened. I've got to get out of Cannes. I've got to. The thousand francs was all I had in my bag. That wasn't enough to take me anywhere. I had the crazy idea that if I gambled and won . . ."

She glanced over his shoulder toward the entrance to the gambling rooms, an expression of terror shadowing her face. "Stand up," she breathed. "Quick. Look at me. Pretend to be talking to me."

Trant jumped up. So did she. She slipped around the table, pressing herself against him, using his body to hide her. "He's there." He could feel her heart beating rapidly. "He . . . Thank God, he went straight into the Salle de Jeu. He didn't see me. Quick!"

She hurried around the dance floor. He followed. Soon they were out in the cool moon-lit April night together.

"Now you *can* help me. Back at the cruiser, I can get some money, pack a few things — if you'll stand guard."

She slid her hand into his. They walked the few yards to the Vieux Port. Fishing nets were stretched like ghostly spiderwebs along the stone docks. The masts of the moored yachts loomed, dark and swaying slightly, before the softer darkness of the southern sky. They hurried past the sterns of anchored fishing boats, motor launches, and pleasure yachts. Beyond a phantom-white sailboat she paused at a narrow gangway leading onto a gray ocean-going cruiser.

"If he comes back, stop him or call out."

"Sure."

"I'll go up over the deck and down the companionway to the cabin. I'll lock the door to be doubly sure. I — I can't tell you how grateful I am." She pressed his hand, hurried across the deck and disappeared.

Savoring adventure and the romantic Riviera night, Trant put his hand against the spar of the neighboring sailboat. The spar was sticky. He removed his hand, and lit a cigarette. His sentry job seemed simple. To his left, the wall of the old harbor reached a dead end at the ocean itself. To his right, down the short strip of dock, he could see the lighted Casino. In the Mediterranean moonlight, he could not fail to detect anyone coming along the deserted wharf.

For a couple of minutes he seemed

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to have the whole enchanted waterfront to himself. Then, suddenly, from the sailboat behind him, he heard a faint scuffling sound. He spun around just in time to see a crouched male figure balance itself and then spring lightly from the bow of the white sailboat onto the front deck of the cruiser.

With anxiety, he realized that the husband had outsmarted them. He had ignored the obvious route along the wharf and had stolen back to the cruiser by jumping from one moored boat to the next. Trant sprang up the gangplank, crossed the cruiser's deck, and scrambled down the companionway. The locked cabin door blocked his path. He banged, calling: "Look out. He's coming from the front."

He broke off at the sound of a high woman's scream, followed by a shot. There was a confused bumping inside the cabin and then a second shot. He hurled himself against the door. It did not yield. A faint moaning sounded inside. Then the door opened inward.

The girl was standing there, the dark hair tumbling around a face blanched with horror. The pink blouse was ripped from one shoulder. She gripped a revolver in her right hand and blood welled, red and gleaming, from her dangling left arm.

"He jumped on me from the cabin window," she babbled. "He had the gun. He — he shot me. Somehow I got the gun away. I . . ."

She threw herself against him, sobbing. Over her shoulder, he could see the disordered cabin. A square open window showed above a tousled bed. On a second bed lay a small half-packed feminine suitcase. An almost empty whiskey bottle stood on a vanity. Sprawled across the floor, his arms flung upward, lay a large dark man in a gray suit. Blood was splashed across the front of his handsome green linen sports shirt.

Gently Trant led the girl to the bathroom and dressed the ugly flesh wound in her arm. He slipped the revolver into his pocket and, pulling the suitcase off the second bed, made her lie down. He stooped to examine the husband. He was clearly dead, only just dead. The bullet had pierced his heart. He still looked grotesquely elegant with his muscular brown throat emerging from the green open collar and the smooth soles of his alligator shoes thrusting up into the air.

The girl had stirred against the pillows and was watching him bleakly.

"He's dead." Trant crossed and, as he put out a comforting hand to her shoulder, he saw the fresh white stain across his palm. Excitement suddenly stirring, he turned back to the dead husband. Then he grabbed up a flashlight, jumped onto the first bed and clambered through the window out onto the cruiser's deck. In the moonlight he could see the spectral white sailboat alongside. He turned the flashlight down onto the cruiser's deck. There he saw distinct white footprints on the gray planks. Two pairs of prints pointed inward; two pairs outward. In a second he was back in the cabin.

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"A rich, unwanted Brazilian husband," he murmured. "And, probably, a poor and very much wanted young Englishman you used to know. Problem: how to replace unwanted former by wanted latter and still keep the dough."

She looked up at him dazedly.

"Ever heard," he continued, "of a friendly American word called 'sucker'? A sucker's a guy you pick up at a casino with a tale about a murderous husband; a sucker's a guy you ask to stand guard outside the yacht while you pack a bag; a sucker's a guy who sees the murderous husband creeping back over the boats; a sucker's a guy who runs to a locked door, bangs, and becomes the star witness for a lovely wife who's just shot a husband in self-defense."

The girl fluttered a small hand.

"Clever," said Trant. "Very clever. But unhappily, there's a question of wet paint." He pointed at his own paint-stained hand. "I grabbed the spar of the sailboat alongside. See the nasty paint on my palm? There are white paint footprints on the deck outside too.

"Somebody jumped from the freshly painted sailboat onto this deck, of course. I saw him. But look at the soles of your husband's chic alligator shoes. How smooth and shiny they are. *Not a speck of paint!* No, it wasn't your husband who jumped. It was your accomplice. Doubtless, the charming young Englishman you used to know. Once he was sure I had seen him jump, all he had to do was to hurry away again back to shore."

He sat by her side on the bed.

"Want me to tell you what happened? First, you planted your boy friend out on one of the boats down the line. Then —" he indicated the near-empty whiskey bottle — "you got your husband neatly plastered until he passed out. Then you messed up the cabin and went sucker-hunting at the casino. Once you'd installed us at a strategic table, with my back to the gambling rooms, you pulled that: 'There-goes-my-husband' gag. After that it was easy to get me to the cruiser where your boy friend staged his deliberately noisy approach along the boats. Meanwhile, for you in the locked cabin, it was a cinch to shoot your cozily drunk husband and give your arm a little flesh wound."

She sprang up. Gently he put his hand on her shoulder.

He paused. "Incidentally, there's another tiny point that a Provençal jury's going to find damning. You claim your husband followed you into the Casino. I'm afraid they'll never believe that. Know why?" He nodded to the dead man's open collar. "There's a rule, a very strict rule in all French Casinos. No one's allowed inside without a necktie."

He shrugged. "I don't suppose the police will have much trouble locating your boy friend."

He looked at her, wondering ruefully why attractive girls did things like this. "Next time you go sucker-hunting — if there *is* a next time — don't pick a policeman."

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HOW JACQUES SPENT HIS WEDDING NIGHT

by HENRY NORTON

A HONEYMOON IN A PALACE. WHAT irony!" Jacques reached for her, but she moved away. Manette had been more difficult each minute since they arrived in Nice, and now she was at the point of complete disapproval.

"Thirty-foot ceilings!" she said.

"Closer to twenty," Jacques said.

But it was a small point in his favor, he knew, even if it had been true. He had erred seriously in failing to secure hotel reservations. But who could have anticipated that the town would be so crowded. Carnival, yes, but did there have to be so many —

"And have the goodness to observe all the faces painted on the ceiling," his bride said formally. "One is not accustomed to being stared at."

They had driven that day from Grasse through the Maritime Alps. The wedding mass had been at noon, and the day was one of rare and tender loveliness. Then at Nice there was no room at the big hotel. There was no room at any hotel.

The rest of the day, through the Battle of the Flowers, through the revelers who threw confetti and plaster balls, they had searched for a place to stay. At dusk, one old concierge to whom they explained their trouble had a suggestion.

"At the Villa DeLappe," he told them, "the family is away. The old caretaker Joseph sometimes rents sleeping rooms, although he is not supposed to. But what have you, one must have a bed, is it not so?"

His smile had been more suggestive than sympathetic, and Manette's agitation was increased. But they found the Villa Delappe, set well back on the hills behind the town. And old Joseph, after chewing his cavalry mustaches and mouthing incredible sums, had at last made them a price for this ground-floor room with its tapestried walls and massive Louis XV bed.

Manette removed her chic hat, and shook plaster dust and confetti from her black hair. Jacques yearned for her and strove for consoling things to say. This was a notable woman, this bride of his. Not only was she lovely to look at, but also she was one of the most expert and highest paid scent blenders in Grasse, that world capital of perfumes.

"Figure you this," he said. "Not the height of the ceiling nor the faces will be seen when the lights are extinguished. And that will no doubt be soon."

Manette looked at the ceiling again, where an ornate crystal chandelier nestled among the terra cotta figurines.

"And how does one extinguish the lights?" she said.

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"Evidently there will be a species of switch."

"One says so," remarked Manette.

Jacques examined the fixture from a number of angles, hoping to see a cord dangling within grasping distance; but there was none. He began a thoughtful circling of the room, knowing from wide experience that some lights are controlled in mysterious fashion by switches set in the walls. But there were none of these. He climbed upon a chair to get a better look at the light, but it still hung high above his head.

"Malediction," he said.

"It is necessary to find that old thief of a caretaker," Manette told him coldly. "The light will not be extinguished by malediction."

Jacques stepped down from the chair. It was in his mind to establish himself as the master of the little household before affairs marched much further. But even though Manette had kicked off her high-heeled pumps, she still stood a few inches taller than he, and she did not seem in the mood to welcome such advices.

"You have reason, clearly," he said.

He peered cautiously out the door of their room. Joseph had disappeared to some hidden lair. The vast hall of the villa was shadowy, lit only by two electric flambeaux near the grand stairway. The vaulted arch of the hall was in total darkness, and the faces looking down at Jacques from the paintings on the walls were dim and somehow inimical. Suits of presumably empty armor stood along the walls. Jacques did not welcome the idea of setting off on a tour of discovery in that huge and alien dwelling.

"Ho, the caretaker," he called.

Ho, ho, ho, said the vaulted ceiling.

Jacques shut the door hastily.

"I will look once more for the switch," he said.

Manette glared at him.

"Without doubt the Marquis DeLappe amuses himself by shouting like a swineherd when he wants a servant!" she snapped. "Sacred blue, is there not a pull-cord or a bell?"

Jacques smote his forehead.

"What a fool," he said.

He returned to the hall. A step from the door there was a cord hanging on the wall. He pulled on it. There was a scream from the bedroom. Frantically he sprang for the door. All was dark within. Manette came out of the darkness into his arms.

"What arrived?" she said.

Jacques laughed reassuringly. "Stand here by the door, little cabbage," he said. "Your Jacques has solved the mystery. Observe. On again. Off. Stupendous, is it not?"

"But what sort of a place for a light switch!"

"For that also I have the solution," Jacques said. He was once more in full command of the situation. "Such gentry as the Marquis would have a servant to help them disrobe. Then safely in bed, they would direct the

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servant to turn off the lights. So."

"Turn it back on," Manette said. "What folly!"

"But yes," Jacques said. "Now, since we do not have the servant to oblige us, your husband will remain here by the pull while you accustom yourself to the bed. At your call I will extinguish the light."

"It will necessitate you to disrobe in darkness."

Grandly he said, "That makes nothing."

In doubtless a much shorter time than it seemed to Jacques, he heard Manette call. He pulled the lights off and was on the point of entering the room when she screamed again.

"But it is only I!" he said.

"The window!" Manette said. "The faces!"

Jacques had but a fleeting impression of something dark that moved outside the casement. "Who lives?" he demanded. Summoning his courage when there was no reply, he went to the window and flung it wide. Again he challenged. There was no answer. He closed the window with care and latched it.

"Perhaps the excitement—"

"I saw them," Manette insisted. "In the instant before the lights went out. There was a Punchinello, and two or three whose masks I could not see clearly. Perhaps a domino."

"Ah, naturally," said Jacques. "Masqueraders, from the carnival. They are perhaps not gentle to peer into windows, but it is the carnival spirit."

"There is such a thing as too much carnival," Manette said.

"They will not bother any more," he said. "Now that the lights are off they will assuredly go away."

Then they heard the clang of the entrance bell.

"Someone sounds," Manette observed.

"Doubtless other travelers like ourselves," said Jacques. "What a day! Now, if you will permit ——"

Manette's voice was soft and slightly muffled by the big down comforter on the Louis XV bed. "But yes," she said.

Jacques stripped off his jacket, somewhat grateful for the darkness. His work did not call for muscularity, and this was well. Sometimes he wondered why the good God had discriminated against him in the matter of size and strength, but he was always consoled by the knowledge that while others might have more muscle, few possessed such a talented nose.

He folded his shirt and placed it carefully on the big carved armoire, and was stooping to unlace his shoes when they heard the commotion in the hall.

First there was the caretaker's voice in angry expostulation, followed by a crisp voice that could have been either a man's or a woman's. There was the sound of a scuffle, an urgent cry from old Joseph, and then silence.

"What arrives?" Manette said.

"That does not please me there," Jacques said. "I would be more content if the door were locked."

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He started for the door, but it opened before he could get there. The light from an electric lantern struck him in the eyes. There were three or four shadowy figures in the doorway, outlined against the illumination from the hall.

The light moved around the room, resting briefly on the mound under the covers that was Manette, and returned to Jacques. The voice they had heard from the hall issued from the grotesque mask of a Punchinello.

"These must be the two the old guy meant."

"Have the goodness to leave this room," Jacques said.

The beam of light left Jacques and circled the walls.

"Where the hell's the light switch?" said the Punchinello.

The light inspected the oil paintings on the walls. "I can't tell if any of these are on the list or not. That one in the corner isn't bad." The beam paused briefly on a painting in gaudy reds and yellows. "It may be the Gauguin."

A domino said, "Where's the light switch, buster?"

The domino's costume was that of a woman, but the voice was a resounding bass. In most of the Riviera carnivals, Jacques remembered, the maskers assumed an opposite sex. Then the Punchinello should be a woman, the dominoes men, and the one with the *papier mâché* lion's head could be either one.

Surely the Punchinello was big for a woman. Those massive shoulders bulged with strength, and even in the loose clownlike costume the arms and thighs strained against the cloth. Jacques tried to see the figure's feet, but the light was too dim.

"Come on, Mac, where's the switch?" said the domino.

There was a fantastic air about it all. The hideous masks, the presence of these intruders with their brutal arrogance, made a nightmare of the scene. And like a sleepwalker, Jacques started forward to go through the door and reach the switch.

He walked straight toward the Punchinello. The masked figure retreated one step. The light blazed into Jacques's face. Then the lion's head said sharply, "Watch it!" and the Punchinello struck Jacques in the mouth with a small hard fist. A heavy ring on one finger broke Jacques's lip, and the blood came.

Manette's howl from the bed held fear, but there were healthy overtones of anger in it. She had heard the soft, slushy sound of the blow, and her head emerged from under the coverlet as the blood was making a red sparkle in the torch light. Manette threw off the covers and stood up on the bed in a nightgown never made for such acrobatics.

"Animals!" she cried. "Blackguards! My husband will assuredly kill every one of you with his bare hands!"

Her voice spurred him like wine. Jacques kicked one of the dominoes in the stomach, and plunged at the Punchinello with both arms extended.

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Instantly they closed in and he was beaten to the floor, kicked, picked up, and knocked down again. Dimly, from a great distance, he heard the high soft voice of the Punchinello.

"Stay here and watch these two, Joe. We got a lot of house to cover."

He heard the clatter of their feet going away across the parquet floor of the hall. The lion's head was perched on one of the small gilt chairs when he sat up. Negligently, the masked figure showed a small black gun in one hand.

"Be good now," the masked one said.

Jacques shook his head and looked reproach at his bride.

"You must not be so proud of me," he said.

He pulled himself up and flopped on the bed. Manette cradled his bruised face in her soft bosom. Time ticked slowly by, punctuated at intervals by the distant noise of the three who were exploring the villa.

There was an audible yawn from behind the lion's head. The guard shifted on the gilt chair, flashed the light restlessly around the room, and back to the couple on the bed.

"What're you two doing in this old dump?" the guard asked. "Nobody was supposed to be here but the caretaker."

"There were no rooms in the town," Manette said. "We purchased the use of this sleeping chamber. It is our wedding night."

"Hey, that's a tough break," said the mask, and yawned again.

"Evidently that one is a woman," Manette whispered.

"Impossible," Jacques said. "How would one figure that?"

Manette hesitated. "Because I have noticed that when the light is flashed this way it rests upon you, and not me. And I have on only this nightgown, so it seems probable ——"

"A stroke of genius, that!" Jacques said. "How you have correctness! It could only be a woman who would not devour you with the eyes. However, the Punchinello called this one Joe."

"Speak more sweetly," she cautioned. "That might be an abbreviation for Josephine, is it not so?"

"What are you two yakkin' about?" the mask demanded.

"Of this and that," Manette said.

Jacques said softly, "You are completely right. I can detect the perfume on this one, and it is a scent that could only be worn by a woman."

The flashlight beam centered on Jacques's face. "Now don't get any funny ideas. You'll be okay. When the others come back we'll leave you to yourselves."

"That's a story like another," Manette murmured.

"Who speaks of ideas?" Jacques said. "I am only conversing lightly with my bride."

"I'll bet you could do it, too," said the lion's head with a hint of wistfulness. "What do you do for a living, buster? When you aren't honeymooning, that is?"

"I am a scent tester," Jacques said.

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"In the city of Grasse, where one creates the fine perfumes."

"One of those guys who sniff each batch to see if it's right? I've heard of 'em."

"I have a great fame for being a smeller," Jacques said with dignity. "I can detect the slightest nuance in the essence of the flowers."

"In your hat," said the mask.

"In my nose," Jacques said. "You doubt. You are wearing *Les Muguets*. It is probably not a well-chosen scent, since I see you are of better than average size."

"How about that?" marveled the mask. "Buster, you're sharp. I'm — Oh, oh, so you've figured out I'm a woman, eh? Well, don't let it throw you. I'll use this gun as quick as any man."

"See how comparable?" Jacques said to Manette.

"What should I wear, then?" said the mask.

Jacques inhaled deeply. "One could not say without seeing the coloring of your hair and skin," he said. "Also, the costume is a factor. With what you are wearing now, one might suggest *Menagerie, Number Five*."

"The boss would kill me," said the mask. "Look, honey, if I give you a little peek at the hair and skin, will you promise not to blurt it to a soul?"

Jacques pondered a moment.

"Look, therefore," he said. "If I were permitted to view your actual appearance, you might then fear I could be a witness against you. That would place me in jeopardy, no?"

"You got a point there," said the mask. "But I'd sure like to be analyzed by an expert."

"Have care," Manette breathed. "Be sage."

"Do not have fear," Jacques reassured. And to the masked one, he said, "There is such a thing as texture. Now we are in a dim light. If I could but place my hands upon the skin and the hair, something might occur to me."

"Brother, you're talking my language," said the lion's head. "How about the bride? Will she object?"

"In France, one has the tolerance," Jacques said.

Easily he slid from the bed, and with slow and unalarming steps went to the chair where the guard sat. He placed a hand on her unresisting throat, and slid it up beneath the grotesque mask. For an instant his fingers toyed with the smooth skin of her neck, then moved up to touch a lock of her hair. She swayed toward him.

"Look, therefore," he said, and clamped both hands firmly on her throat.

She stiffened, and brought the gun up in her hand. Manette came out of the bed like a tigress, struck her brutally across the wrist, and the gun fell to the floor. Manette caught the kicking feet and held them. The figure in the mask jerked a few times then slackened. They let her slide to the floor, and Manette moved her own hands to the throat and strad-

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dled the still form with a total lack of modesty.

"Find ropes, and some species of gag," she gasped.

"One thousand thunders," Jacques said. "What now?"

"Secure this one, and we will go. We will leave this house of evil chance. We will find a peaceful bench in the park," Manette said. "But hurry yourself!"

"Directly!" Jacques said.

He tore strips from the silken sheets of the nuptial couch. He wrapped the unconscious guard like a mummy. He tore off the lion's-head mask. The woman who wore it was blonde, square-jawed, and blue-eyed. With an excess of cosmetic removed, and the laxness of partial asphyxiation gone from her face, she might have been pretty. Jacques stuffed her mouth with sheeting, and bound another strip around her jaws. Manette stood up.

"Let us march," she said.

"Outside the house it makes the good weather," Jacques reminded her. "But perhaps even so, your garb ——"

Manette became conscious then of the filmy gown that slanted so alluringly from her rounded shoulders, that so intimately followed the lush curves of her body.

"God guard me!" she said, and dived for the bed.

"I am your married one," Jacques said. "Let it not discommode you. I will regard this species of a camel's daughter while you array yourself in something suitable. Then we shall go."

"Directly," Manette said.

The blonde regained consciousness as he watched her, struggled a moment against her bonds, tried to spit out the gag, and then fell to breathing heavily through her nose, with her wild and frightened eyes following Jacques's every move.

"Now I am ready," Manette said.

"Then we go," Jacques said. And to the fettered woman he said kindly, "They will discover you in good time. You have nothing to fear."

The woman gurgled.

"She deserves no pity," Manette said.

"She receives none," said Jacques.

They moved cautiously out of the bedroom, across the high-vaulted hall. Once, as they tiptoed across the intricate terrazo, they heard the far-off, bumbling voices of the three who were up in the villa. The sounds came from a great distance, and the hearts of Manette and Jacques leaped at the thought of escape.

They reached the entrance. Joseph lay there, his gray head on the tiles, with a little reddish-brown pool gathering by it. Manette gave an exclamation of distress.

"The poor old man," she said.

She dropped to her knees by his side and lifted his head. Jacques knelt beside her, unbuttoned the old man's collar, and slipped a hand inside his jacket, against the lean chest.

"The poor old man is dead," he said.

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Manette recoiled and screamed. Her voice rang high and shrill through the echoing old house. There was an instant of spun-out silence, and then racing steps from upstairs.

"Now the devil is loose," Jacques said.

He sprang to the front door. It was key-locked, and it resisted his efforts to break it open. He turned back to the body of the old man, searching frantically for the key. It was not on the caretaker's belt; it was not in his pockets. A few precious seconds slipped away.

"They come!" Manette said.

"Retreat to the room," Jacques said. "We will depart by the windows!"

They ran to the room, heedless now of noise. Jacques tugged at the light cord as they passed it, and when they entered the room it was blazing with light. The blonde was still bound on the floor, and her eyes rolled as she watched them sprint for the windows.

Jacques unlatched the tall casements and swung them wide. He stepped over the low sill onto a concrete gallery, turned and held out his hands to Manette.

Behind him a voice said, "Arrest yourselves!"

"Pestilence!" Jacques said. "There is a guard!"

"He is but one man," Manette said softly.

The one who came toward them from the shadows was in the costume of the local gendarmerie, looking most authentic. He displayed no gun. He said, "What is it that arrives here?"

Manette sprang like a cat from the window-sill. She landed on the man's back. The man stumbled forward, and Jacques interposed a foot. The man stumbled and went down. His head met the low concrete railing of the gallery with a crisp sound.

Figures then began to spill through the open window behind them. The two dominoes swarmed out, while the Punchinello held the light at the window.

"Holy smoke, what a pair," said one of the dominoes. "They're beatin' up a cop!"

"Heaven," Manette gasped. "It was a true policeman!"

Wearily, the Punchinello said, "Bring 'em all in."

They lifted the unconscious gendarme through the window and disposed him in a corner, breathing stertorously. At gun-point they herded Manette and Jacques back into their room. As Manette clambered up through the window one of the dominoes assisted her in such a fashion that she gasped.

"Take guard, cow," she said, "or my husband will cut your throat, if he had a knife."

"That one there is certainly a man," Jacques observed.

The Punchinello, he had decided, was a woman. As he went past her through the window, his trained nose caught the scent of *Chypre*. Not a very feminine scent, to be sure, but not a very feminine-acting woman,

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either. So the group was composed of two men and two women. Two to one. It made the odds seem somehow not so formidable.

There was a little pile of oil paintings by the door. The canvases had been cut from their frames and piled loosely together. The entire fantastic proceeding began to take shape in Jacques's mind now. It was a clever plan. The Villa DeLappe was widely famous for its fine original paintings. Now, during the confusion and anonymity of carnival, these brigands had planned to loot the villa of its priceless collection. Doubtless they planned to sell them in the United States, where there were always buyers for art treasures. Clever, yes — but he and Manette had been caught in the operation.

The Punchinello bent and stripped the fetters from the blonde. The woman stood up slowly, and then the Punchinello slapped her, two solid ringing blows that made her stagger.

"Get yourself mousetrapped by a pair of yokels, will you?" the Punchinello said. "Now, come on. We've got another wing to cover. Doc, you stay here and see if you can keep these two quiet while we finish up."

One of the dominoes nodded. "I'll handle 'em."

Manette and Jacques sat on the bed. They heard the three others go back up the big marble staircase to the second floor. There was a hopelessness about their situation now. The officer who might have rescued them was out of combat.

"How I am fatigued," Manette said. "Let us to bed."

She turned her face away from the guard as she spoke, and closed one eye significantly. Jacques assumed from that action that she had some plan in view. Still, under the circumstances, the thought of bed was of dubious appeal.

"With this person here?" he said.

"Evidently that, yes," said Manette.

She stood up and slipped off the jacket of her suit. There was calculation in the slow grace of her movements, and the domino stood up also.

"Say," he said thickly, "you're kinda cute."

Manette turned and gave him a slow smile.

"Take guard, mister," she said. "My husband has a nature of the utmost jealousy."

For an instant the domino hesitated. Manette loosened her blouse. Then she bent down alluringly to remove one of her pumps. The guard's hesitation vanished. He reversed the gun in his hand, holding it by the short barrel, and started toward Jacques.

"We'll put your husband to sleep."

As the domino moved past Manette with his arm upraised, she thumped him behind the ear with the point of a three-inch heel. He slumped to the floor without a sound, and Manette bent over and with careful calculation hit him behind the other ear.

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"I must apologize that I did not allow my husband to deal with you personally," she said to the unconscious domino. "But this had the semblance of a reasonable way to proceed."

"What a woman!" Jacques said. "A veritable jewel!"

She smiled shyly. "It is a procedure that I have seen in the cinema," she said. "Really, it makes nothing."

"It was a masterstroke," Jacques insisted. "Now let us fly from this accursed place."

"You are not serious," Manette said.

"My God, that I am not serious!" Jacques said. "What have you?"

"Think there, the policeman has seen no one but us. If he revives after the brigands are gone, he will conclude that we are the ones who have despoiled the villa. He will pursue us to the utterance."

"Let us take him with us."

"It does not matter where he revives," Manette pointed out. "That which is important is that he should see the real robbers."

"But how that is impossible!"

"Not at all. We will capture the others."

"My little," Jacques said anxiously, "it seems to me that you have spiders on your ceiling. What you suggest is of the utmost impossibility."

"Impossible is a word I do not love on the lips of my husband," Manette said coolly. "Behold, we have taken two of them at various times. Surely we can devise some way of taking the others. How the people will cheer. You will be of a heroism stupendous!"

The combination of reproof and promise in her words conjured up a headier scent than Jacques had ever encountered in the flower-shot laboratories of Grasse. He arose, kissed his wife tenderly and at length, and then assisted her in the fettering and gagging of the prostrate domino. Then, in stockinged feet, they crept out into the central hall — like mice in a castle of cats.

Above them, as before, they could hear the faint sounds made by the three despoilers. They went toward them, up the towering marble staircase. The sounds were still above them.

"Now one must make a plan," Jacques said.

He led the way down the hall to where a light shone through an open door. Here was evidence that the thieves had already been at work. Two gaping frames in the little salon had been relieved of their paintings. A magnificent gold-chased suit of armor was dismantled, apparently by the old caretaker for polishing, as the polish and rags were still beside it. Jacques's mind went to the old man who would polish no more armor, and a fierce rage burned in his breast. These callous outlanders with their fantastic argot and their brutal competence and their wicked guns!

His eyes went back to the armor. "Hold!" he said softly to Manette. "I did not have the good fortune to

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fight for the motherland in the war, but I recall to myself what our hairy ones told of the terror caused by the armored assault trucks. Truly, then guns were of no consequence."

Manette followed his gaze. "My brave," she said. "I do believe that you have there an idea of a certain size."

"I will become a tank," Jacques said.

"What a formidable man," Manette said . . .

The Punchinello, the lion's head, and the other domino came down the stairs from the third floor with leisure and unhushed voices. They did not observe that one of the lights in a second-floor room had been turned off. They proceeded down the grand stairway, becoming a little more cautious as they did so, and advanced upon the open door of the room that had been intended, eons ago, for a honeymoon.

The Punchinello's voice soared in shrill fury. "Those devils have done it again! Let's get out of here before they come back with the law!"

"Wait a minute!" It was the blonde with the lion's head. "That window's still locked from the inside. And you've got the key to the front door. They're still in the house!"

Without waiting to untie the unconscious domino, they erupted into the central hall. At the foot of the staircase they stopped, and with considerable reason.

At the head of the stairs a glittering figure stood, with the light from the flambeau striking fire from its gold surfaces. It was a man in armor, its visor closed, and a great spear held in one hand. It stood an instant, awesome and spectral, seemingly the embodiment of the villa's own wrath against its ravishers. For that instant, the three hoodlums at the foot of the stairs were close to panic. Then, unfortunately, the figure spoke.

"Put down your guns and surrender yourselves!" it said in a voice that broke with excitement.

The domino swore. "It's one of those crazy newlyweds — I tell you, they're nuts!"

"Well, let's take him," said the Punchinello. "A .38 ought to go through that old tinplate like cheese."

The Punchinello fired, but the bullet missed in the dim light. Jacques, inside the armor, took heart. He raised the spear and hurled it down the stairs. The weapon flew halfway, and then rolled clattering down the rest of the steps.

"Don't shoot any more," said the domino. "We can take the jerk apart by hand."

They advanced together up the stairway. Jacques burst into cold sweat. He strained against the containing metal, and started to turn in flight. But the visor obscured his sight, and his foot slipped over the top step.

They were halfway up the staircase when he started to fall, and there was no time for them to get out of the way. He came down like an avalanche, gaining momentum with each

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bounce. In his crashing fall he swept the three of them from their feet. The blonde in the lion's-head mask managed to fall forward and cling to the steps, but the Punchinello and the domino fell the rest of the way down, banged repeatedly against the marble steps, and when the three of them rolled out onto the parquet floor of the hall, they all lay motionless.

It was at this moment that the gendarme, aroused by the shot and the tremendous noise of Jacques's fall, staggered out into the hall with his pistol in his hand.

"Hold, everybody!" he shouted. "Halt! All the world is under arrest!"

Manette had followed her husband's fall closely, pausing only to kick the blonde woman in the temple as she passed. She explained matters now to the game but groggy policeman, and between them they managed to secure the unconscious malefactors before any of them regained consciousness.

"And your heroic husband," the gendarme said. "One hopes that he has not perished in the debacle of overturning."

Jacques spoke hollowly from within the helmet.

"I live," he said, "but I am remarkably shaken. That one might release me from this anchovy tin!"

Manette was kneeling by him now. "The buckles appear to be bent," she said. "No doubt the fall has done this. If the gendarme will be so good as to assist ——"

"First let us convey this hero to the bed," said the policeman. "Surely it is the least we can do."

Between them they managed to half-carry, half-drag the armored Jacques to the bedchamber and deposit him upon the Louis XV bed. The gendarme examined the buckles and shook his head sadly.

"They are atrociously malformed," he said. "They cannot be taken off without damage to the armor itself."

"Sacred blue, what does it require?" demanded the enraged Manette. "A chisel? A wrench? Permit me ——"

"Oh, mercy," said the gendarme. "This armor is worth a million francs. We can not think of damaging it! I will send to Lyons at once for an armorer. With good chance, he will be here tomorrow, and will effect our hero's release. Until then you may perhaps feed him soups and milk through the visor."

They were gone at last, the brigands and the gendarme. Joseph's body had been disposed of, and Manette and Jacques were in bed at last. She snuggled close, and felt the chill of steel through her nightgown.

"My brave," she said. "My soul. How does it go in the anchovy tin?"

Jacques groaned. "At least," he said. "In the usual anchovy tin there is more than one anchovy!"

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SYNOPSIS: *Just when Tom and Huck have the spring fever, and have it bad, they are summoned to visit Tom's Aunt Sally and Uncle Silas, who are in considerable trouble and would like to have the boys with them for "comfort." A rich neighbor, Brace Dunlap, wants to marry Aunt Sally's and Uncle Silas's daughter, Benny, but the parents have told him p'int blank that he can't. Apparently, Brace Dunlap is now making things rough for Tom's relatives who, in an attempt to appease Dunlap, have hired his shiftless, no-good brother, Jubiter, to work on Uncle Silas's farm. Jubiter is one of twins, and his twin brother, Jake, is a notorious thief who hasn't been seen for seven years and is supposed to have come to a very bad end.*

Well, Tom and Huck take a Mississippi River steamboat, and on board they learn of a mysterious passenger. By a ruse they get into his stateroom. The passenger turns out to be the supposedly dead Jake Dunlap, who, terrified for his life, is being hunted by two ex-partners in crime, also on the boat. Jake tells the boys how he, Bud Dixon, and Hal Clayton stole two di'monds as big as hazelnuts, and not being able to divide up two di'monds amongst three, began doublecrossing each other. Finally, Jake got possession of the di'monds and now has them hidden in one of his boot-heels.

Well, the steamboat's machinery breaks down, and one night, while the engines are being fixed, Jake, disguised in blue goggles and the naturalest-looking false whiskers, makes his getaway. But his former pals get wind of it and take after him. Tom and Huck are pretty sorrowful over Jake's chances of staying alive. . . . Well, the boys had promised to meet Jake in a little bunch of sycamores right back of Tom's Uncle Silas's tobacker-field. So, on landing, they go straight to the sycamores where they see a couple of men running into the grove and hear two or three terrible screams for help. Then, from a hiding place, they see four men running out of the grove, two chasing two. They are sure now that Jake Dunlap has been caught up with and killed. Then, to their horror, they see something coming towards them in the shadder of the trees. It is Jake Dunlap's ghost!

TOM SAWYER, DETECTIVE: *Part Two*

by MARK TWAIN

IT WAS JAKE DUNLAP'S GHOST! WE couldn't stir for a minute; then it was gone. We talked and Tom says: "They're mostly dim and smoky, or like they're made out of fog, but this one wasn't. No sir, this one wasn't!"

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"No," I says; "I seen the goggles and the whiskers perfectly plain."

"Yes, and the very colors in them loud countrified Sunday clothes — plaid breeches, green and black —"

"Cotton-velvet westcot, fire-red and yaller squares —"

"Leather straps to the bottoms of the breeches legs and one of them hanging unbuttoned —"

"Yes, and that hat —"

"What a hat for a ghost to wear!"

You see it was the first season anybody wore that kind — a black stiff-brim stove-pipe, very high, and not smooth, with a round top — just like a sugar-loaf.

"Did you notice if its hair was the same, Huck?"

"No — seems to me I did, then again it seems to me I didn't."

"I didn't either; but it had its bag along, I noticed that."

"So did I. How can there be a ghost-bag, Tom?"

"Sho! I wouldn't be as ignorant as that if I was you, Huck Finn. Whatever a ghost has, turns to ghost-stuff. They've got to have their things, like anybody else. You see, yourself, that its clothes was turned to ghost-stuff. Well, then, what's to hender its bag from turning, too? Of course it done it."

That was reasonable. I couldn't find no fault with it. Bill Withers and his brother Jack come along by, talking, and Jack says:

"What do you reckon he was toting?"

"I dunno; but it was pretty heavy."

"Yes, all he could lug. Stealing corn from old Parson Silas, I judged."

"So did I. And so I allowed I wouldn't let on to see him."

"That's me, too."

Then they both laughed, and went on out of hearing. It showed how unpopular old Uncle Silas had got to be now. They wouldn't 'a' let someone steal anybody else's corn and never done anything to him.

We heard some more voices mumbling along towards us and getting louder, and sometimes a cackle of a laugh. It was Lem Beebe and Jim Lane. Jim Lane says:

"Who? — Jubiter Dunlap?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I don't know. I reckon so. I seen him spading up some ground along about an hour ago, just before sundown — him and the parson. Said he guessed he wouldn't go tonight, but we could have his dog if we wanted him."

"Too tired, I reckon."

"Yes — works so hard!"

"Oh, you bet!"

They cackled at that, and went on by. Tom said we better jump out and tag along after them, because they was going our way and it wouldn't be comfortable to run across the ghost all by ourselves. So we done it, and got home all right.

That night was the second of September — a Saturday. I sha'n't ever forget it. You'll see why, pretty soon.

We tramped along behind Jim and Lem till we come to the back stile

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where old Jim's cabin was that he was captivated in, the time we set him free, and here come the dogs piling around us to say howdy, and there was the lights of the house, too; so we warn't afeard any more, and was going to climb over, but Tom says:

"Hold on; set down here a minute. By George!"

"What's the matter?" says I.

"Matter enough!" he says. "Wasn't you expecting we would be the first to tell the family who it is that's been killed yonder in the sycamores, and all about them rapscallions that done it, and about the di'monds they've smouched off of the corpse, and paint it up fine, and have the glory of being the ones that knows a lot more about it than anybody else?"

"Why, of course. It wouldn't be you, Tom Sawyer, if you was to let such a chance go by. I reckon it ain't going to suffer none for lack of paint," I says, "when you start in to scollop the facts."

"Well, now," he says, perfectly ca'm, "what would you say if I was to tell you I ain't going to start in at all?"

I was astonished to hear him talk so. I says:

"I'd say it's a lie. You ain't in earnest, Tom Sawyer?"

"You'll soon see. Was the ghost barefooted?"

"No, it wasn't. What of it?"

"You wait — I'll show you what. Did it have its boots on?"

"Yes. I seen them plain."

"Swear it?"

"Yes, I swear it."

"So do I. Now do you know what that means?"

"No. What does it mean?"

"Means that them thieves *didn't get the di'monds.*"

"Jiminy! What makes you think that?"

"I don't only think it, I know it. Didn't the breeches and goggles and whiskers and handbag and every blessed thing turn to ghost-stuff? Everything it had on turned, didn't it? It shows that the reason its boots turned too was because it still had them on after it started to go ha'nting around, and if that ain't proof that them blatherskites didn't get the boots, I'd like to know what you'd *call* proof."

Think of that now. I never see such a head as that boy had. Why, *I* had eyes and I could see things, but they never meant nothing to me. But Tom Sawyer was different. When Tom Sawyer seen a thing it just got up on its hind legs and *talked* to him — told him everything it knowed. *I* never see such a head.

"Tom Sawyer," I says, "I'll say it again as I've said it a many a time before: I ain't fitten to black your boots. But that's all right — that's neither here nor there. God Almighty made us all, and some He gives eyes that's blind, and some He gives eyes that can see, and I reckon it ain't none of our lookout what He done it for; it's all right, or He'd 'a' fixed it some

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other way. Go on — I see plenty plain enough, now, that them thieves didn't get away with the di'monds. Why didn't they, do you reckon?"

"Because they got chased away by them other two men before they could pull the boots off of the corpse."

"That's so! I see it now. But looky here, Tom, why ain't we to go and tell about it?"

"Oh, shucks, Huck Finn, can't you see? Look at it. What's a-going to happen? There's going to be an inquest in the morning. Them two men will tell how they heard the yells and rushed there just in time to not save the stranger. Then the jury'll twaddle and twaddle and twaddle, and finally they'll fetch in a verdict that he got shot or stuck or busted over the head with something, and come to his death by the inspiration of God. And after they've buried him they'll auction off his things for to pay the expenses, and then's *our* chance."

"How, Tom?"

"Buy the boots for two dollars!"

Well, it 'most took my breath.

"My land! Why, Tom, *we'll* get the di'monds!"

"You bet. Some day there'll be a big reward offered for them — a thousand dollars, sure. That's our money! Now we'll trot in and see the folks. And mind you we don't know anything about any murder, or any di'monds, or any thieves — don't you forget that."

I had to sigh a little over the way he had got it fixed. *I*'d 'a' *sold* them di'monds — yes, sir — for twelve thousand dollars; but I didn't say anything. It wouldn't done any good. I says:

"But what are we going to tell your aunt Sally has made us so long getting down here from the village, Tom?"

"Oh, I'll leave that to you," he says. "I reckon you can explain it somehow."

He was always just that strict and delicate. He never would tell a lie himself.

We struck across the big yard, noticing this, that, and t'other thing that was so familiar, and we so glad to see it again, and when we got to the roofed big passageway betwixt the double log house and the kitchen part, there was everything hanging on the wall just as it used to was, even to uncle Silas's old faded green baize working-gown with the hood to it, and raggedy white patch between the shoulders that always looked like somebody had hit him with a snowball; and then we lifted the latch and walked in. Aunt Sally she was just a-ripping and a-tearing around, and the children was huddled in one corner, and the old man he was huddled in the other and praying for help in time of need. She jumped for us with joy and tears running down her face and give us a whacking box on the ear, and then hugged us and kissed us and boxed us again, and just couldn't seem to get enough of it, she was so glad to see us; and she says:

"Where *have* you been a-loafing to, you good-for-nothing trash! I've been

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that worried about you I didn't know what to do. Your traps has been here *ever* so long, and I've had supper cooked fresh about four times so as to have it hot and good when you come, till at last my patience is just plumb wore out, and I declare I — I — why I could skin you alive! You must be starving, poor things! — set down, set down, everybody; don't lose no more time."

It was good to be there again behind all that noble corn-pone and spareribs, and everything that you could ever want in this world. Old uncle Silas he peeled off one of his bulliest old-time blessings, with as many layers to it as an onion, and whilst the angels was hauling in the slack of it I was trying to study up what to say about what kept us so long. When our plates was all loadened and we'd got a-going, she asked me, and I says:

"Well, you see — er — Mizzes —"

"Huck Finn! Since when am I Mizzes to you? Have I ever been stingy of cuffs or kisses for you since the day you stood in this room and I took you for Tom Sawyer and blessed God for sending you to me, though you told me four thousand lies and I believed every one of them like a simpleton? Call me Aunt Sally — like you always done."

So I done it. And I says:

"Well, me and Tom allowed we would come along afoot and take a smell of the woods, and we run across Lem Beebe and Jim Lane, and they asked us to go with them blackberrying tonight, and said they could borrow Jubiter Dunlap's dog, because he had told them just that minute —"

"Where did they see him?" says the old man; and when I looked up to see how *he* come to take an intrust in a little thing like that, his eyes was just burning into me, he was that eager. It surprised me so it kind of throwed me off, but I pulled myself together again and says:

"It was when he was spading up some ground along with you, towards sundown or along there."

He only said, "Um," in a kind of a disappointed way, and didn't take no more intrust. So I went on. I says:

"Well, then, as I was a-saying —"

"That'll do, you needn't go no furder." It was aunt Sally. She was boring right into me with her eyes, and very indignant. "Huck Finn," she says, "how'd them men come to talk about going a-blackberrying in September — in *this* region?"

I see I had slipped up, and I couldn't say a word. She waited, still a-gazing at me, then she says:

"And how'd they come to strike that idiot idea of going a-blackberrying in the night?"

"Well, m'm, they — er — they told us they had a lantern, and —"

"Oh, *shet* up — do! Looky here; what was they going to do with a dog — hunt blackberries with it?"

"I think, m'm, they —"

"Now, Tom Sawyer, what kind of a lie are you fixing *your* mouth to contribit to this mess of rubbage? Speak out — and I warn you before you begin that I don't believe a word

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of it. You and Huck's been up to something you no business to — *I* know it perfectly well; *I* know you, *both* of you. Now you explain that dog, and them blackberries, and the lantern, and the rest of that rot — and mind you talk as straight as a string — do you hear?"

Tom he looked considerable hurt, and says, very dignified:

"It is a pity if Huck is to be talked to that way, just for making a little bit of a mistake that anybody could make."

"What mistake has he made?"

"Why, only the mistake of saying blackberries when of course he meant strawberries."

"Tom Sawyer, I lay if you aggravate me a little more, I'll —"

"Aunt Sally, without knowing it — and of course without intending it — you are in the wrong. If you'd 'a' studied natural history the way you ought, you would know that all over the world except just here in Arkansaw they *always* hunt strawberries with a dog — and a lantern —"

But she busted in on him there and just piled into him and snowed him under. She was so mad she couldn't get the words out fast enough, and she gushed them out in one everlasting freshet. That was what Tom Sawyer was after. He allowed to work her up and get her started and then leave her alone and let her burn herself out. Then she would be so aggravated with that subject that she wouldn't say another word about it, nor let anybody else. Well, it happened just so. When she was tuckered out and had to hold up, he says, quite ca'm:

"And yet, all the same, Aunt Sally —"

"Shet up!" she says, "I don't want to hear another word out of you."

So we was perfectly safe, then, and didn't have no more trouble about that delay. Tom done it elegant.

Benny she was looking pretty sober, and she sighed some, now and then; but pretty soon she got to asking about Mary, and Sid, and Tom's aunt Polly, and then aunt Sally's clouds cleared off and she got in a good humor and joined in on the questions and was her lovingest best self, and so the rest of the supper went along gay and pleasant. But the old man he didn't take any hand hardly, and was absent-minded and restless, and done a considerable amount of sighing; and it was kind of heartbreaking to see him so sad and troubled and worried.

By and by, a spell after supper, come a man and knocked on the door and put his head in with his old straw hat in his hand bowing and scraping, and said his Marse Brace was out at the stile and wanted his brother Jubiter, and was getting tired waiting supper for him, and would Marse Silas please tell him where he was? I never see uncle Silas speak up so sharp and fractious before. He says:

"Am *I* his brother's keeper?" And then he kind of wilted together, and looked like he wished he hadn't spoken so, and then he says, very gentle: "But you needn't say that,

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Billy; I was took sudden and irritable, and I ain't very well these days, and not hardly responsible. Tell him he ain't here."

And when the man was gone uncle Silas got up and walked the floor, backwards and forwards, mumbling and muttering to himself and plowing his hands through his hair. It was real pitiful to see him. Aunt Sally she whispered to us and told us not to take notice of him, it embarrassed him. She said he was always thinking and thinking, since these troubles come on, and she allowed he didn't more'n about half know what he was about when the thinking-spells was on him; and she said he walked in his sleep considerable more now than he used to, and sometimes wandered around over the house and even outdoors in his sleep, and if we catched him at it we must let him alone and not disturb him. She said she reckoned it didn't do him no harm, and maybe it done him good. She said Benny was the only one that was much help to him these days. Said Benny appeared to know just when to try to soothe him and when to leave him alone.

So he kept on tramping up and down the floor and muttering, till by and by he begun to look pretty tired; then Benny she went and snuggled up to his side and put one hand in his and one arm around his waist and walked with him; and he smiled down on her, and reached down and kissed her; and so, little by little the trouble went out of his face and she persuaded him off to his room.

Aunt Sally she was busy getting the children ready for bed; so by and by it got dull and tedious, and me and Tom took a turn in the moonlight, and fetched up in the watermelon-patch and et one, and had a good deal of talk. And Tom said he'd bet the quarreling was all Jubiter's fault, and he was going to be on hand the first time he got a chance, and see; and if it was so, he was going to do his level best to get uncle Silas to turn him off.

And so we talked and smoked and stuffed watermelons much as two hours, and then it was pretty late, and when we got back the house was quiet and dark, and everybody gone to bed.

Tom he always seen everything, and now he see that the old green baize work-gown was gone, and said it wasn't gone when he went out; so he allowed it was curious, and then we went up to bed.

We could hear Benny stirring around in her room, which was next to ourn, and judged she was worried a good deal about her father and couldn't sleep. We found we couldn't, neither. So we set up a long time, and smoked and talked in a low voice, and felt pretty dull and downhearted. We talked the murder and the ghost over and over again, and got so creepy and crawly we couldn't get sleepy nohow and noway.

By and by, when it was away late in the night and all the sounds was late sounds and solemn, Tom nudged me and whispers to me to look, and I done it, and there we see a man

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poking around in the yard like he didn't know just what he wanted to do, but it was pretty dim and we couldn't see him good. Then he started for the stile, and as he went over it the moon came out strong, and he had a long-handled shovel over his shoulder, and we see the white patch on the old work-gown. So Tom says:

"He's a-walking in his sleep. I wish we was allowed to follow him and see where he's going to. There, he's turned down by the tobacker-field. Out of sight now. It's a dreadful pity he can't rest no better."

We waited a long time, but he didn't come back any more, or if he did he come around the other way; so at last we was tuckered out and went to sleep and had nightmares, a million of them. But before dawn we was awake again, because meantime a storm had come up and been raging, and the thunder and lightning was awful, and the wind was a-thrashing the trees around, and the rain was driving down in slanting sheets, and the gullies was running rivers. Tom says:

"Looky here, Huck, I'll tell you one thing that's mighty curious. Up to the time we went out last night the family hadn't heard about Jake Dunlap being murdered. Now the men that chased Hal Clayton and Bud Dixon away would spread the thing around in a half an hour, and every neighbor that heard it would shin out and fly around from one farm to t'other and try to be the first to tell the news. Land, they don't have such a big thing as that to tell twice in thirty year! Huck, it's mighty strange; I don't understand it."

So then he was in a fidget for the rain to let up, so we could turn out and run across some of the people and see if they would say anything about it to us. And he said if they did we must be horribly surprised and shocked.

We was out and gone the minute the rain stopped. It was just broad day then. We loafed along up the road, and now and then met a person and stopped and said howdy, and told them when we come, and how we left the folks at home, and how long we was going to stay, and all that, but none of them said a word about that thing; which was just astonishing, and no mistake. Tom said he believed if we went to the sycamores we would find that body laying there solitary and alone, and not a soul around. Said he believed the men chased the thieves so far into the woods that the thieves prob'ly seen a good chance and turned on them at last, and maybe they all killed each other, and so there wasn't anybody left to tell.

First we knowed, gabbling along that away, we was right at the sycamores. The cold chills trickled down my back and I wouldn't budge another step, for all Tom's persuading. But he couldn't hold in; he'd *got* to see if the boots was safe on that body yet. So he crope in — and the next minute out he come again with his

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eyes bulging, he was so excited, and says:

"Huck, it's gone!"

I *was* astonished. I says:

"Tom, you don't mean it."

"It's gone, sure. There ain't a sign of it. The ground is trampled some, but if there was any blood it's all washed away by the storm, for it's all puddles and slush in there."

At last I give in, and went and took a look myself; and it was just as Tom said — there wasn't a sign of a corpse.

"Dern it," I says, "the di'monds is gone. Don't you reckon the thieves slunk back and lugged him off, Tom?"

"Looks like it. It just does. Now where'd they hide him, do you reckon?"

"I don't know," I says, disgusted, "and what's more I don't care. They've got the boots, and that's all *I* cared about. He'll lay around these woods a long time before *I* hunt him up."

Tom didn't feel no more intrust in him neither, only curiosity to know what come of him; but he said we'd lay low and keep dark and it wouldn't be long till the dogs or somebody rousted him out.

We went back home to breakfast ever so bothered and put out and disappointed and swindled. I warn't ever so down on a corpse before.

It warn't very cheerful at breakfast. Aunt Sally she looked old and tired and let the children snarl and fuss at one another and didn't seem to notice it was going on, which wasn't her usual style; me and Tom had a-plenty to think about without talking; Benny she looked like she hadn't had much sleep, and whenever she'd lift her head a little and steal a look towards her father you could see there was tears in her eyes; and as for the old man, his things stayed on his plate and got cold without him knowing they was there, I reckon, for he was thinking and thinking all the time, and never said a word and never et a bite.

By and by when it was stillest, that man's head was poked in at the door again, and he said his Marse Brace was getting powerful uneasy about Marse Jubiter, which hadn't come home yet, and would Marse Silas please —

He was looking at uncle Silas, and he stopped there, like the rest of his words was froze; for uncle Silas he rose up shaky and steadied himself leaning his fingers on the table, and he was panting, and his eyes was set on the man, and he kept swallowing, and put his other hand up to his throat a couple of times, and at last he got his words started, and says:

"Does he — does he — think — *what* does he think! Tell him — tell him —" Then he sunk down in his chair limp and weak, and says, so as you could hardly hear him: "Go away — go away!"

The man looked scared and cleared out, and we all felt — well, I don't know how we felt, but it was awful, with the old man panting there, and his eyes set and looking like a person that was dying. None of us could

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budge; but Benny she slid around soft, with her tears running down, and stood by his side, and nestled his old gray head up against her and begun to stroke it and pet it with her hands, and nodded to us to go away, and we done it, going out very quiet, like the dead was there.

Me and Tom struck out for the woods mighty solemn, and saying how different it was now to what it was last summer when we was here and everything was so peaceful and happy and everybody thought so much of uncle Silas, and he was so cheerful and simple-hearted and pudd'n-headed and good — and now look at him. If he hadn't lost his mind he wasn't much short of it. That was what we allowed.

It was a most lovely day now, and bright and sunshiny; and the further and further we went over the hills towards the prairie the lovelier and lovelier the trees and flowers got to be and the more it seemed strange and somehow wrong that there had to be trouble in such a world as this. And then all of a sudden I catched my breath and grabbed Tom's arm, and all my livers and lungs and things fell down into my legs.

"There it is!" I says. We jumped back behind a bush shivering, and Tom says:

"'Sh! — don't make a noise."

It was setting on a log right in the edge of a little prairie, thinking. I tried to get Tom to come away, but he wouldn't, and I dasn't budge by myself. He said we mightn't ever get another chance to see one, and he was going to look his fill at this one if he died for it. So I looked too, though it give me the fantods to do it. Tom he *had* to talk, but he talked low. He says:

"Poor Jake, it's got all its things on, just as he said he would. *Now* you see what we wasn't certain about — its hair. It's not long now the way it was: it's got it cropped close to its head, the way he said he would. Huck, I never see anything look any more naturaler than what it does."

"Nor I neither," I says; "I'd reconnize it anywheres."

"So would I. It looks perfectly solid and genuwyne, just the way it done before it died."

So we kept a-gazing. Pretty soon Tom says:

"Huck, there's something mighty curious about this one, don't you know? *It* oughtn't to be going around in the daytime."

"That's so, Tom — I never heard the like of it before."

"No, sir, they don't ever come out only at night — and then not till after twelve. There's something wrong about this one, now you mark my words. I don't believe it's got any right to be around in the daytime. But don't it look natural! Jake was going to play deef and dumb here, so the neighbors wouldn't know his voice. Do you reckon it would do that if we was to holler at it?"

"Lordy, Tom, don't talk so! If you was to holler at it I'd die in my tracks."

"Don't you worry, I ain't going to

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holler at it. Look, Huck, it's a-scratching its head — don't you see?"

"Well, what of it?"

"Why, this. What's the sense of it scratching its head? There ain't anything there to itch; its head is made out of fog or something like that, and *can't* itch. A fog can't itch; any fool knows that."

"Well, then, if it don't itch and can't itch, what in the nation is it scratching it for? Ain't it just habit, don't you reckon?"

"No, sir, I don't. I ain't a bit satisfied about the way this one acts. I've a blame good notion it's a bogus one — I have, as sure as I'm a-setting here. Because, if it — Huck!"

"Well, what's the matter now?"

"*You can't see the bushes through it!*"

"Why, Tom, it's so, sure! It's as solid as a cow. I sort of begin to think —"

"Huck, it's biting off a chaw of tobacker! By George, *they* don't chaw — they hain't got anything to chaw *with*. Huck!"

"I'm a-listening."

"It ain't a ghost at all. It's Jake Dunlap his own self!"

"Oh your granny!" I says.

"Huck Finn, did we find any corpse in the sycamores?"

"No."

"Or any sign of one?"

"No."

"Mighty good reason. Hadn't ever been any corpse there."

"Why, Tom, you know we heard —"

"Yes, we did — heard a howl or two. Does that prove anybody was killed? 'Course it don't. And we seen four men run, then this one come walking out and we took it for a ghost. No more ghost than you are. It was Jake Dunlap his own self, and it's Jake Dunlap now. He's been and got his hair cropped, the way he said he would, and he's playing himself for a stranger, just the same as he said he would, with them goggles and false whiskers, just the way he said he would. He's as sound as a nut."

Then I see it all, and how we had took too much for granted. I was powerful glad he didn't get killed, and so was Tom, and we wondered which he would like the best — for us to never let on to know him, or how? Tom reckoned the best way would be to go and ask him. So he started; but I kept a little behind, because I didn't know but it might be a ghost, after all. When Tom got to where he was, he says:

"Me and Huck's mighty glad to see you again, and you needn't be afeared we'll tell. And if you think it'll be safer for you if we don't let on to know you when we run across you, say the word and you'll see you can depend on us, and would ruther cut our hands off than get you into the least little bit of danger."

First off he looked surprised to see us, and not very glad, either; but as Tom went on he looked pleasanter, and when he was done he smiled, and nodded his head several times, and made signs with his hands, and says:

"Goo-goo — goo-goo," the way deef and dummies does.

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Just then we see some of Steve Nickerson's people coming that lived t'other side of the prairie, so Tom says:

"You do it elegant; I never see anybody do it better. You're right; play it on us, too; play it on us same as the others; it'll keep you in practice and prevent you making blunders. We'll keep away from you and let on we don't know you, but any time we can be any help, you just let us know."

Then we loafed along past the Nickersons, and of course they asked if that was the new stranger yonder, and where'd he come from, and what was his name, and which communion was he, Babtis' or Methodis', and which politics, Whig or Democrat, and how long is he staying, and all them other questions that humans always asks when a stranger comes, and animals does, too. But Tom said he warn't able to make anything out of deef and dumb signs, and the same with goo-gooing. Then we watched them go and bullyrag Jake; because we was pretty uneasy for him. Tom said it would take him days to get so he wouldn't forget he was a deef and dummy sometimes, and speak out before he thought. When we had watched long enough to see that Jake was getting along all right and working his signs very good, we loafed along again, allowing to strike the schoolhouse about recess time, which was a three-mile tramp.

I was so disappointed not to hear Jake tell about the row in the sycamores, and how near he come to getting killed, that I couldn't seem to get over it, and Tom he felt the same, but said if we was in Jake's fix we would want to go careful and keep still and not take any chances.

The boys and girls was all glad to see us again, and we had a real good time all through recess. Coming to school the Henderson boys had come across the new deef and dummy and told the rest; so all the scholars was chuck-full of him and couldn't talk about anything else, and was in a sweat to get a sight of him because they hadn't ever seen a deef and dummy in their lives, and it made a powerful excitement.

Tom said it was tough to have to keep mum now; said we would be heroes if we could come out and tell all we knowed; but after all, it was still more heroic to keep mum, there warn't two boys in a million could do it. That was Tom Sawyer's idea about it, and I reckoned there warn't anybody could better it.

In the next two or three days Dummy he got to be powerful popular. He went associating around with the neighbors, and they made much of him, and was proud to have such a rattling curiosity among them. They had him to breakfast, they had him to dinner, they had him to supper; they kept him loaded up with hog and hominy, and warn't ever tired staring at him and wondering over him, and wishing they knowed more about him, he was so uncommon and romantic. His signs warn't no good;

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people couldn't understand them and he prob'ly couldn't himself, but he done a sight of goo-gooing, and so everybody was satisfied, and admired to hear him do it. He toted a piece of slate around, and a pencil; and people wrote questions on it and he wrote answers; but there warn't anybody could read his writing but Brace Dunlap. Brace said he couldn't read it very good, but he could manage to dig out the meaning most of the time. He said Dummy said he belonged away off somers and used to be well off, but got busted by swindlers which he had trusted, and was poor now, and hadn't any way to make a living.

Everybody praised Brace Dunlap for being so good to that stranger. He let him have a little log cabin all to himself, and had his men take care of it, and fetch him all the vittles he wanted.

Dummy was at our house some, because old uncle Silas was so afflicted himself, these days, that anybody else that was afflicted was a comfort to him. Me and Tom didn't let on that we had knowed him before, and he didn't let on that he had knowed us before. The family talked their troubles out before him the same as if he wasn't there, but we reckoned it wasn't any harm for him to hear what they said. Gener'ly he didn't seem to notice, but sometimes he did.

Well, two or three days went along, and everybody got to getting uneasy about Jubiter Dunlap. Everybody was asking everybody if they had any idea what had become of him. No, they hadn't, they said; and they shook their heads and said there was something powerful strange about it. Another and another day went by; then there was a report got around that p'raps he was murdered. You bet it made a big stir! Everybody's tongue was clacking away after that. Saturday two or three gangs turned out and hunted the woods to see if they could run across his remainders. Me and Tom helped, and it was noble good times and exciting. Tom he was so brimful of it he couldn't eat nor rest. He said if we could find that corpse we would be celebrated, and more talked about than if we got drownded.

The others got tired and give it up; but not Tom Sawyer — that warn't his style. Saturday night he didn't sleep any, hardly, trying to think up a plan; and towards daylight in the morning he struck it. He snaked me out of bed and was all excited, and says:

"Quick, Huck, snatch on your clothes — I've got it! Bloodhound!"

In two minutes we was tearing up the river road in the dark towards the village. Old Jeff Hooker had a bloodhound, and Tom was going to borrow him. I says:

"The trail's too old, Tom — and besides, it's rained, you know."

"It don't make any difference, Huck. If the body's hid in the woods anywhere around the hound will find it. If he's been murdered and buried, they wouldn't bury him deep, it ain't

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likely, and if the dog goes over the spot he'll scent him, sure. Huck, we're going to be celebrated, sure as you're born!"

He was just a-blazing; and whenever he got afire he was most likely to get afire all over. That was the way this time. In two minutes he had got it all ciphered out, and wasn't only just going to find the corpse — no, he was going to get on the track of that murderer and hunt *him* down, too; and not only that, but he was going to stick to him till —

"Well," I says, "you better find the corpse first; I reckon that's a-plenty for today. For all we know, there *ain't* any corpse and nobody hain't been murdered. That cuss could 'a' gone off somers and not been killed at all."

That graveled him, and he says:

"Huck Finn, I never see such a person as you to want to spoil everything. As long as *you* can't see anything hopeful in a thing, you won't let anybody else. What good can it do you to throw cold water on that corpse and get up that selfish theory that there ain't been any murder? None in the world. I don't see how you can act so. I wouldn't treat you like that, and you know it. Here we've got a noble good opportunity to make a ruputation, and —"

"Oh, go ahead," I says. "I'm sorry, and I take it all back. I didn't mean nothing. Fix it any way you want it. *He* ain't any consequence to me. If he's killed, I'm as glad of it as you are; and if he —"

"I never said anything about being glad; I only —"

"Well, then, I'm as *sorry* as you are. Any way you druther have it, that is the way *I* druther have it. He —"

"There ain't any druthers *about* it, Huck Finn; nobody said anything about druthers. And as for — "

He forgot he was talking, and went tramping along, studying. He begun to get excited again, and pretty soon he says:

"Huck, it'll be the bulliest thing that ever happened if we find the body after everybody else has quit looking, and then go ahead and hunt up the murderer. It won't only be an honor to us, but it'll be an honor to uncle Silas because it was us that done it. It'll set him up again, you see if it don't."

But old Jeff Hooker he throwed cold water on the whole business when we got to his blacksmith-shop and told him what we come for.

"You can take the dog," he says, "but you ain't a-going to find any corpse, because there ain't any corpse to find. Everybody's quit looking, and they're right. Soon as they come to think, they knowed there warn't no corpse. And I'll tell you for why. What does a person kill another person *for*, Tom Sawyer? — answer me that."

"Why, he — er —"

"Answer up! You ain't no fool. What does he kill him *for?*"

"Well, sometimes it's for revenge, and —"

"Wait. One thing at a time. Re-

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venge, says you; and right you are. Now who ever had anything agin that poor trifling no-account? Who do you reckon would want to kill *him?* — that rabbit!"

Tom was stuck. I reckon he hadn't thought of a person having to have a *reason* for killing a person before, and now he sees it warn't likely anybody would have that much of a grudge against a lamb like Jubiter Dunlap. The blacksmith says, by and by:

"The revenge idea won't work, you see. Well, then, what's next? Robbery? B' gosh, that must 'a' been it, Tom! Yes, sirree, I reckon we've struck it this time. Some feller wanted his gallus-buckles, and so he —"

But it was so funny he busted out laughing, and just went *on* laughing and laughing and laughing till he was 'most dead, and Tom looked so put out and cheap that I knowed he was ashamed he had come, and he wished he hadn't. But old Hooker never let up on him. He raked up everything a person ever could want to kill another person about, and any fool could see they didn't any of them fit this case, and he just made no end of fun of the whole business and of the people that had been hunting the body; and he said:

"If they'd had any sense they'd 'a' knowed the lazy cuss slid out because he wanted a loafing-spell after all this work. He'll come pottering back in a couple of weeks, and then how'll you fellers feel? But, laws bless you, take the dog, and go and hunt his remainders. Do, Tom."

Then he busted out, and had another of them forty-rod laughs of hisn. Tom couldn't back down after all this, so he said, "All right, unchain him"; and the blacksmith done it, and we started home and left that old man laughing yet.

It was a lovely dog. There ain't any dog that's got a lovelier disposition than a bloodhound, and this one knowed us and liked us. He capered and raced around ever so friendly, and powerful glad to be free and have a holiday; but Tom was so cut up he couldn't take any intrust in him, and said he wished he'd stopped and thought a minute before he ever started on such a fool errand. He said old Jeff Hooker would tell everybody, and we'd never hear the last of it.

So we loafed along home down the back lanes, feeling pretty glum and not talking. When we was passing the far corner of our tobacker-field we heard the dog set up a long howl in there, and we went to the place and he was scratching the ground with all his might, and every now and then canting up his head sideways and fetching another howl.

It was a long square, the shape of a grave; the rain had made it sink down and show the shape. The minute we come and stood there we looked at one another and never said a word. When the dog had dug down only a few inches he grabbed something and pulled it up, and it was an arm and a sleeve. Tom kind of gasped out, and says:

"Come away, Huck — it's found."

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I just felt awful. We struck for the road and fetched the first men that come along. They got a spade at the crib and dug out the body, and you never see such an excitement. You couldn't make anything out of the face, but you didn't need to. Everybody said:

"Poor Jubiter; it's his clothes, to the last rag!"

Some rushed off to spread the news and tell the justice of the peace and have an inquest, and me and Tom lit out for the house. Tom was all afire and 'most out of breath when we come tearing in where uncle Silas and aunt Sally and Benny was. Tom sung out:

"Me and Huck's found Jubiter Dunlap's corpse all by ourselves with a bloodhound, after everybody else had quit hunting and given it up; and if it hadn't 'a' been for us it never *would* 'a' been found; and he *was* murdered too — they done it with a club or something like that; and I'm going to start in and find the murderer, next, and I bet I'll do it!"

Aunt Sally and Benny sprung up pale and astonished, but uncle Silas fell right forward out of his chair onto the floor and groans out:

"Oh, my God, you've found him *now!*"

Them awful words froze us solid. We couldn't move hand or foot for as much as half a minute. Then we kind of come to, and lifted the old man up and got him into his chair, and Benny petted him and kissed him and tried to comfort him, and poor old aunt Sally she done the same; but, poor things, they was so broke up and scared and knocked out of their right minds that they didn't hardly know what they was about. With Tom it was awful; it 'most petrified him to think maybe he had got his uncle into a thousand times more trouble than ever, and maybe it wouldn't ever happened if he hadn't been so ambitious to get celebrated, and let the corpse alone the way the others done. But pretty soon he sort of come to himself again and says:

"Uncle Silas, don't you say another word like that. It's dangerous, and there ain't a shadder of truth in it."

Aunt Sally and Benny was thankful to hear him say that, and they said the same; but the old man he wagged his head sorrowful and hopeless, and the tears run down his face, and he says:

"No — I done it; poor Jubiter, I done it!"

It was dreadful to hear him say it. Then he went on and told about it, and said it happened the day me and Tom come — along about sundown. He said Jubiter pestered him and aggravated him till he was so mad he just sort of lost his mind and grabbed up a stick and hit him over the head with all his might, and Jubiter dropped in his tracks. Then he was scared and sorry, and got down on his knees and lifted his head up, and begged him to speak and say he wasn't dead; and before long he come to, and when he see who it was holding his head, he jumped like he was 'most scared to

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death, and cleared the fence and tore into the woods, and was gone. So he hoped he wasn't hurt bad.

"But laws," he says, "it was only just fear that gave him that last little spurt of strength, and of course it soon played out and he laid down in the bush, and there wasn't anybody to help him, and he died."

Then the old man cried and grieved, and said he was a murderer and the mark of Cain was on him, and he had disgraced his family and was going to be found out and hung. But Tom said:

"No, you ain't going to be found out. You *didn't* kill him. *One* lick wouldn't kill him. Somebody else done it."

"Oh, yes," he says, "I done it — nobody else. Who else had anything against him? Who else *could* have anything against him?"

He looked up kind of like he hoped some of us could mention somebody that could have a grudge against that harmless no-account, but of course it warn't no use — he *had* us; we couldn't say a word. He noticed that, and he saddened down again, and I never see a face so miserable and so pitiful to see. Tom had a sudden idea, and says:

"But hold on! — somebody *buried* him. Now who —"

He shut off sudden. I knowed the reason. It give me the cold shudders when he said them words, because right away I remembered about us seeing uncle Silas prowling around with a long-handled shovel away in the night that night. And I knowed Benny seen him, too, because she was talking about it one day. The minute Tom shut off he changed the subject and went to begging uncle Silas to keep mum, and the rest of us done the same, and said he *must*, and said it wasn't his business to tell on himself, and if he kept mum nobody would ever know; but if it was found out and any harm come to him it would break the family's hearts and kill them, and yet never do anybody any good. So at last he promised. We was all of us more comfortable, then, and went to work to cheer up the old man. We told him all he'd got to do was to keep still, and it wouldn't be long till the whole thing would blow over and be forgot. We all said there wouldn't anybody ever suspect uncle Silas, nor ever dream of such a thing, he being so good and kind, and having such a good character; and Tom says, cordial and hearty:

"Why, just look at it a minute; just consider. Here is Uncle Silas, all these years a preacher — at his own expense; all these years doing good with all his might and every way he can think of — at his own expense, all the time; always been loved by everybody, and respected; always been peaceable and minding his own business, the very last man in this whole deestrict to touch a person, and everybody knows it. Suspect *him?* Why, it ain't any more possible than —"

"By authority of the State of Arkansaw, I arrest you for the murder of Jubiter Dunlap!" shouts the sheriff at the door.

(*to be concluded next month*)

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AND TURN THE HOUR

by PETER GODFREY

THE WORLD SMILED . . . IT WAS warm, and its warmth prickled through his eyelids, behind his eyes, and there was another warmth inside that prickled up to meet it. An excitement, a lazy grasshopper springing of memories. New memories. The money, first. No more grind, no more debt, no more working for other people. And then Heath. Yes, Heath in his arms, her eyes bright but her lower lip tremulous in the ecstasy of saying yes. Last night. Wonderful night. And now the sun was shining.

He bought a new watch. On impulse. There was some sort of symbolism there, but nothing deep. New life — new watch. He came out of the shop like a schoolboy on a holiday, unstrapping his old watch, dropping it carefully into his left-hand trouser pocket. He put the new one on his wrist, and adjusted the hands to conform with the clock in the tower of the City Hall. 10:55. He started to wind.

A vague cloud passed through his mind. He should have wound first, of course. Maybe a minute . . . He looked at the City Hall clock again, and then down at his wrist. 11:47. And they both gave the same time.

He felt a sudden nausea, and then his mind reeled in a drunken clutch of hope. This was his old watch on his wrist. He must have put the new one in his pocket. A mistake of some kind . . .

His hand reached into his pocket, fingers groping, pulling out the contents. He looked. An unused cinema ticket and a crushed white flower trembled in his palm. He had never seen them before.

The warmth behind his eyelids turned into a shaft of cold.

"And that is all he can remember," said Dr. Beresky. He shook his lined head gently, and his large ears trembled. Then he added, "I am very worried about him."

Rolf le Roux leaned forward sympathetically, and held his pipe for a moment away from his beard. "I still don't understand," he said, "why you have come to me."

Beresky answered his question only obliquely. He said, "Let me tell you something about amnesia. First, it is brought on by a trauma — a shock. Second, when an amnesia victim visits a psychiatrist, he already wants to be cured, and so he is well on the way to curing himself. All I have to do is show him the right road." He cleared his throat. "Young Winter came to me of his own accord, it is true, but there are still undeniable signs that he does not wish to be cured. Yes, I say that even though he is tortured by the idea that without

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a cure he will go mad, that he will lose the girl to whom he has just become engaged, and all the benefits of the large sum of money he has just inherited."

Rolf asked, "Have you any idea why he does not want to be cured?"

"Yes, but only in very general terms. I can say, with some certainty that he does not want to remember what happened in the missing 52 minutes because the event or events which caused the shock are too unpleasant for him to face." He hesitated. "That much one can say of amnesia generally, but in Winter's case the resistance to remembering is so strong that the cause must have been something . . . unthinkable."

Rolf prompted again: "And you have come to me?"

"Because you live in the same lodging-house as Winter, and he is fond of you and has confidence in you. Perhaps you can help break down his resistance. And then again, you have a connection with the police."

"In what way is that useful?"

"Mr. le Roux, if it would only be possible for us to find out where Winter went during the missing period, exactly what he did —"

Rolf said, "That may be more difficult than you think. After all, the trail is five days old. But I am quite prepared to try."

"Thank you," said Beresky, and hesitated again. "Perhaps the police would know of some incident, some violent incident, which happened during that time, which Winter might have seen or been involved in. If so ——"

"It is worth looking into, Dr. Beresky, but anything violent would certainly have got into the newspapers, and I have seen nothing there. No. But there are other things which may help. Let us see. We know certain details about the period. We know that at the outset something happened to destroy Winter's balance of mind. We know that he was in Plein Street or the immediate vicinity at the time. We know that after that he did certain things — he rid himself of the new watch and put the old one on his wrist, and he acquired a cinema ticket and a flower, a white lily. These things, I should imagine, must bear some relationship to the shock which caused the mental imbalance?"

"Definitely."

"And in your treatment you yourself have discovered nothing more about any of these individual items?"

"Nothing that sheds any real light on the matter to me. But perhaps if you . . . Look, Mr. le Roux, I will be treating Winter at 2:30 this afternoon. If you would like to be present, it might have a helpful influence. As things stand, I do not see what harm it could do. Personally, I am at a dead end."

"I would very much like to come," said Rolf.

The call from Detective-Sergeant Johnson came while Rolf was still in

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the waiting room of the nursing-home.

"Nothing," said Johnson. "No complaints at all from the vicinity of Plein Street — in fact, there was no crime of violence at all in Cape Town during the daylight hours of that day. There was a fight between some drunken sailors at the bottom of Adderley Street just after 6 P.M., but I don't suppose that qualifies."

Rolf said, "No. The incident, whatever it was, must have occurred near Plein Street between say 10:45 and noon. And it must have been sufficiently horrible to make a normal youngster lose his memory. That's all I can tell you at the moment. Perhaps this afternoon. . . . I will get in touch with you again later. And what about street accidents? Have you checked them?"

"Yes. No luck there either. Still, there may have been one unreported. I'll try the hospitals for you this afternoon, Oom. Will you give me a ring at Caledon Square before six? I may have something by then."

As Rolf hung up, Dr. Beresky came bustling in. He shook hands. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting," he said, "but I am quite ready now. Will you come this way?"

Rolf followed him down a cream-colored passage.

Donald Winter lay fully dressed on a couch in the room. He looked up as they entered, but slowly, as though his muscles were responding rustily and his thoughts were somewhere in the distance.

"Your old friend Mr. le Roux is here," said Beresky. "He is trying to help us."

Winter said, "Hullo, Oom." Again it was a slow reflex action; his voice was expressionless. All the same, in brief tantalizing flashes, panic chased hope across his eyes. Rolf thought of those eyes as he had last seen them — alert and full of fun. He took one of the chairs at the side of the couch.

Beresky took the other. He rolled up the boy's right sleeve, found a vein, and inserted the needle of a hypodermic syringe. He explained: "I am injecting sodium pentothol, an hypnotic drug. It helps release the inhibitions. Donald, will you please start counting?"

Winter said, "One, two, three, four . . . five . . . shix." His voice blurred sleepily. Beresky ceased his slow pressure on the plunger. He started to talk, slowly and distinctly.

"Donald, think back to when you were walking down Plein Street. You were very happy because you had inherited money and just become engaged. You passed a jeweler's shop, turned in, and bought a watch. Then what did you do?"

"I put . . . the new . . . on wrist . . . the old in . . . pocket."

"And then?"

"Adjust time. With clock. Wind watch."

"Go on."

"Looked at clock again. Time . . . had changed."

Beresky said, "Listen carefully. Time doesn't just change. Hours

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don't vanish into thin air. Between the times the clock changed you did things, saw things. You know that, don't you?"

The boy on the couch moved his head from side to side. He groaned.

Beresky persisted: "You know that, don't you? Answer me."

The boy said, "Please . . . leave . . . alone." His left hand started to clench and unclench. He whimpered.

"What was it you did, Donald? What was it you saw?"

The boy gritted his teeth, jerked his head aside in a parody of violence.

"What did you do? What did you see?"

Winter tried weakly to pull his right wrist out of Beresky's grasp. He flexed his knees, rolled his head. He opened his mouth as though he was going to shout, but the voice that emerged was barely a whisper: "No."

Beresky mopped his forehead. "All right, boy," he said. "I won't ask you again. Not now, anyway. Relax. That's right. Nobody's going to hurt you. Good. Now we're going to have another little experiment. You won't even have to think, this time. When I ask you a question, just tell me what comes into your mind. Ready?"

"Yes."

"Then here's the first word: Watch?"

The boy hardly hesitated: "Life."

"Don't just answer with a single word," said Beresky. "Tell me *everything* that comes into your mind. Now, let's try again: Flower?"

The boy remained silent.

Beresky repeated: "Flower?"

"Verse."

"Go on."

"Flower. Verse. White. Pure." The next two words then came bursting from his lips: "No blood!"

"All right, Donald. Easy, now. Think of a special kind of flower. A lily. That's your word — lily."

Winters said, "Lily . . . of Laguna. Lagoon. Sea. Muizenberg. Sand. White sand. White hand." He began to move his head again.

Beresky pressed him: "White hand?"

The boy moaned.

"White?"

"Clean. Pure."

"Hand?"

The boy screamed.

Beresky came with Rolf out into the sunlight. The psychiatrist said, "You see now what I mean when I say the shock he experienced must have been horrible. And violent."

"Horror is relative," said Rolf. "The simplest acts may have an element of horror to a specific individual. I, for example, hate to kill spiders . . . it is a question of a particular type of upbringing and personal experiences. But you are right — what shocked the hour loose from Winter's life is associated with violence. With the shedding of blood. And yet there were no crimes of violence that day."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Almost certain. I will know definitely tonight. . . . Look, Doctor,

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doesn't Winter's fiancee live near here? Maybe she can help."

"Miss Cooper? I've already spoken to her, and I doubt if . . . but perhaps you may discover something. She lives about four blocks down. That big apartment building on the left side of the road."

"I will find it," said Rolf, and then, "Goodbye, Doctor. I will telephone you tomorrow."

The apartment building was ultra-modern, all chrome and glass, and the girl who answered his ring was refreshing in her naturalness. She wore her hair long and loose, and dressed with that artless simplicity which is the truest smartness.

Rolf introduced himself, explained the purpose of his visit. She said, "Oh, yes, Mr. le Roux. Donald has often spoken of you. Come inside, please. This is my brother Arthur."

A sullen, powerfully-built man stood up, extended a perfunctory hand in greeting. "Sorry I can't stay," he said. "But if you're going to talk about Winter, I can't be any use." His voice was both unpleasant and impatient. He went out.

Heath Cooper said, "Tell me Mr. le Roux, is Donald any better?"

Rolf shook his head. "No, Miss Cooper. But you may be able to help."

She said impulsively, "I feel I've known you for a long time. Call me Heath. I will call you Oom." And then, "What can I do?"

Rolf took a deep pull at his pipe. "Let me explain. Donald has lost his memory because of some deep shock he experienced that morning. If I can find what caused that shock . . ."

She shook her head helplessly. "I didn't see him at all, Oom. I had an appointment with my dressmaker. We had arranged to meet in the afternoon, but of course —"

"And you can think of nothing that might have put him in a state of mind where a shock might be accentuated? Did you get the impression that he was worried?"

"Nothing, Oom. All his worries had gone. He'd just inherited his money. We'd just become engaged. We were both very happy. More happy, I suppose, than most couples, because . . . well, if it hadn't been for the money, Donald would never have asked me to marry him."

"Why not?"

"Well, probably on account of my brother — really my half-brother, Oom. He and Donald don't like each other, as you might have noticed. Arthur's a rich man, and he supports me. Donald didn't realize I'd cheerfully have given everything up just to be with him. He had some silly pride that made him keep silent until he could afford to give me everything that Arthur . . . But of course the inheritance cleared up that barrier."

"I see. And how long have you known Donald?"

"Just over a year."

"And did he talk freely to you about his past life?"

"Yes. He's a very frank sort of person, Oom."

Rolf said, "I am going to mention

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a few words. See if any of them strikes a chord in connection with anything Donald has ever told you. Concentrate. I'll say them slowly."

"I'm ready."

"Right. Here they are: Flower. Muizenberg. Hand. Blood."

She leaned forward in bewilderment. "Nothing, Oom, nothing."

The tears were in her eyes again.

Rolf looked at his watch as he came out of the apartment building, and walked briskly to a taxi-rank. He gave the driver the address of his lodgings. Once there, he spoke persuasively to the proprietor, got from him a key, and let himself into Winter's room.

For a moment he stood irresolute. In his mind he heard Beresky say *Flower* and the blurred voice answer *Verse*. He moved to the bookcase.

There were two volumes of poetry, one by William Morris and the other by Kipling. He took both books to the table. He thought of going through them for an hour or so; then he remembered an old trick. He allowed both books to fall open naturally. The William Morris book fell open at *The Haystack in the Floods*. Before reading, he turned his eyes to the Kipling volume, and suddenly prickled in discovery. The page that faced him carried a poem called *The Flowers*.

He read it through carefully, word by word. Then, with the stem of his pipe, he scored the page next to the third verse:

Buy my English posies:
Here's to match your need —
Buy a tuft of royal heath,
Buy a bunch of weed
White as sands of Muizenberg
Spun before the gale —
Buy my heath and lilies
And I'll tell you whence you hail.
Under hot Constantia broad the vineyards lie;
Throned and thorned the aching berg props the speckless sky;
Slow below the Wynberg firs trails the tilted wain:
Take the flower, and turn the hour, and kiss your love again.[1]

In his mind Rolf began to see the dim outlines of a pattern, and he did not like what he saw. He went over the words again. *Royal heath*, he said to himself, and then *Heath and lilies*. The word *white* leaped at him from the context. He remembered the boy's association — *pure* — and he saw again Heath Cooper and the appeal in her eyes. And he remembered the boy's next words, "No blood!"

He said aloud, " 'Take the flower, and turn the hour, and kiss your love again,' " and then, " 'And turn the hour, and kiss. . . .' "

The pattern began to take shape.

He took the volume with him, locked the door, and went down the passage to his own room. He sat by the telephone for some time before he dialed. He asked for Johnson.

[1] *"Flowers", from* THE SEVEN SEAS *by Rudyard Kipling. Copyright, 1896, by Rudyard Kipling, reprinted by permission of Mrs. George Bambridge and Doubleday and Co., Inc.*

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"That you, Oom? No luck at all. No hospital cases unreported —"

"No, that's all right, Johnson. There's something else, now. This boy's name is Donald Winter — make a note of that. I want you to find out if there's any record of him being involved in a murder case some time in the past. Wait, I can give you more details. The murder was one where the victim bled a lot, and it must have happened over a year ago."

On his way to Caledon Square, Rolf stopped off at the post office. He looked at the long rank of the flower stalls, alive with color and rubbed his beard contemplatively.

An old woman brandished a fragrant bunch under his nose. "Only two shillings, Master," she said.

She looked bright-eyed and intelligent. "I have ten shillings for you," said Rolf, "if you can find me the flower-seller who sold one white lily to a young man last Friday morning, and there will be another ten shillings for this person."

"Yes, Master." She bustled off, talking to this stall and that. In a short while she was back with a man, who looked at Rolf suspiciously. He said, "I sold a young man a white lily last Friday morning. What does the Master want to know?"

"Everything you can tell me."

"He asked for a lily, and I sold it to him. That is all." The man was uncomfortable; he was holding his left hand very firmly in his pocket.

On inspiration Rolf said, "I am not from the police, and you may keep the watch." He took out an additional note, and the man thawed visibly.

He said, "I think the young Master was mad. He did not want a bunch of flowers. He said he must have just one lily, and it must be pure white. I found one and he gave me a shilling for it. Then I saw him standing on the corner, and he squashed the lily in his hand and put it in his pocket. I did not see him after that."

Rolf handed over the notes. He prompted: "And the watch?"

"He had two watches, Master, an old one and a new one. He was holding them both in his left hand while he was talking to me. After he crushed the flower, he put the old watch back on his wrist and dropped the new one in the gutter. I picked it up. If the young Master . . ."

"It is all right," said Rolf. "He does not want it any more."

Round the corner, in Plein Street, he took the cinema ticket from his wallet, and showed it at the box office where it had been purchased. The hard blonde gave a cursory glance at it, and spoke before he could say anything. "No returns."

"This is not my ticket," said Rolf. "I am from the police, and I am making certain inquiries. Do you remember selling this ticket to a young man last Friday morning?"

"Mister," said the blonde, "I sell 500 tickets to young men every morning, and if you line them all up in front of me five minutes later, I

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still wouldn't be able to swear to any one of them."

Rolf persisted: "But this young man did not go into the cinema. Do you remember anything about that?"

"I wouldn't, but Jimmy might. Jimmy!"

The uniformed man at the door came over. Rolf explained again.

"Come to think of it," said Jimmy, "I do remember something. Young guy with fair hair?"

"Yes."

"Well, he acted a bit screwy. He bought the ticket, all right, and then came over to look at the poster. We had a featurette on that day which was also advertised — a 'Crime Does Not Pay' short — and he seemed to be peering at the announcement. All of a sudden he just walked away."

"Do you remember the feature film?"

"Last Friday? Wait a minute. Abbott and Costello . . . no, that was on Thursday only. Roy Rogers was on at the beginning of the week. I've got it — Burt Lancaster."

"And the title of the picture?"

"*Kiss the Blood off My Hands.*"

The pattern was balanced, complete. Except for the murder. And Johnson got hold of the particulars.

It had happened 27 months before. The victim was a young man named Clyde Parsons, and his throat had been cut in the dining-room of his apartment in Fresnaye. There were signs of a slight struggle; Parsons had been forced back onto a table before the murderer could effect the lethal cut. The weapon was left on the floor, but it had been wiped clean of fingerprints. Blood was all over the room.

And Donald Winter?

"Clyde Parsons was a great friend of mine," Winter had said in his statement, "and I was in the habit of letting myself into his apartment without knocking. I did not have a key, and the door was always locked when Parsons was out. On the evening of August 17, at approximately 8 P.M. I called round at Parsons's rooms. I could hear the radio playing inside and the door was unlocked, so I was surprised not to find any lights burning. I had just turned on the switch when I was struck over the head and lost consciousness. I recovered consciousness only two hours later under the care of the police surgeon. . . . No, I did not see the person who struck me. All I saw before I was struck was a hand covered with blood, holding an iron poker. Apart from the blood, I am unable to remember whether there was anything distinctive about the hand, but I do have the feeling that there was some abnormality about it which I have forgotten, and which I will recognize if I ever see the hand again. . . . Yes, Parsons was very popular and to the best of my knowledge had no enemies. However, when I had seen him the day before, he had mentioned he had worries in connection with someone called Prentice."

With his thumbnail Johnson underlined the last sentence. "And this

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name, Oom," he said, "is the most interesting feature of the whole case."

"Why so?"

"We've heard of it in other connections. Nothing definite, you understand. Scraps of reported conversation, and a couple of anonymous letters, but enough to convince us that this Prentice, whoever he or she may be, is a very remarkable blackmailer."

"Why do you say Prentice may be a woman?"

"Well, there's nothing in any of our information to indicate sex, so I'm just covering every contingency. Besides, I've always found women turn more readily to blackmail than men."

Rolf grinned. "It seems to me you know the wrong type of women," he said. "But seriously, I think I can find Prentice for you. Only there will be no evidence."

"Yes? But will there be any possible grounds which might justify a temporary arrest?"

"I think so."

"Then you needn't worry about evidence. If I can show Prentice under lock and key to a certain woman, and promise her complete anonymity, then she'll talk. And we'll also hear from some of the others. When can we make this arrest?"

Rolf said, "Tomorrow morning, I think — I will telephone you tonight with details. But you will have to promise to do exactly as I say. There are more things at stake than the arrest of a murderer I'm afraid."

He left then, taking the bus and the long walk back to his room.

But before he caught the bus he telephoned Heath. And he chose the telephone booth on the corner of Plein Street, near the jeweler's shop where Donald Winter had bought his watch.

He asked her questions, and knew the answers before she gave them.

"Yes, Oom. My dressmaker has a room in a building on the corner of Plein Street. Murray House. She's on the second floor. And, yes, we did stand talking on her balcony for quite a while."

In his room, Rolf thought again of the problem and its two aspects — the past and the future. The past he knew — every twist and nook and cranny; but when he thought of the future his mind was shadowy, groping. It was possible that success on the one side would lead to disaster on the other. He did not know enough to decide such a momentous matter. It was a decision for a specialist.

Regretfully, he decided it would be better if he shared his information. He hoped Dr. Beresky would approve his plan.

He reached stubby fingers for the telephone directory.

The bell was pressed long and loud. The time was seven in the morning.

Inside there was a muttered curse, and then the door was opened violently by a man in pajamas and dressing-gown. There were traces of

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shaving lather on his face. He said, "What the devil do you want?"

The fresh-complexioned man asked, "Mr. Arthur Cooper?"

"Yes?"

"I am Detective-Sergeant Johnson of the Cape Town C.I.D. I believe you know Mr. le Roux, Dr. Beresky, and Mr. Winter. I am sorry we've disturbed you up so early in the morning, but we were anxious to find both you and your sister at home. There is an urgent matter to discuss."

Cooper hesitated, then said ungraciously, "Well, come in."

They filed into the living-room.

Heath was there, also in a dressing-gown. She said "Donald!" and made as though to go to him, but Beresky's expression stopped her. She sat down and looked at the boy. He did not look at her. His actions were slow and mechanical.

Cooper said, "Well, come on. What is this urgent business?"

Johnson looked at Rolf, who said, "I will explain." He settled himself in a chair, and his eyes moved from Cooper to Winter to Heath.

Rolf said, "You all know that Donald is suffering from amnesia. There is almost an hour missing from his life. The investigation of what happened in that hour has led straight back to a murder which was committed more than two years ago. Donald was a witness. He walked into the victim's rooms before the murderer had left, and was knocked unconscious. All he saw, just before he was hit, was a bloodstained hand holding a poker. But there was something about that hand that made him know he would recognize it if he ever saw it again. Some sort of physical difference from other hands. And a physical difference that was not apparent normally, but only when the hand was *gripping* something."

"What has that got to do with us?" said Cooper impatiently.

"I will tell you," said Rolf. "The morning when Donald fell ill, he looked at a balcony, and saw a hand gripping the railing. It was a hand with the same infirmity as the one which had gripped the poker on the night of the murder. When he saw to whom the hand belonged, his mind was upset."

Heath asked, "Whose hand was it, Oom?"

Rolf looked at her steadily. He said, "Yours."

Only the boy did not look at her. He stared intently at the far corner, and his face was twisted in uncomprehending misery.

Heath started to say, "Oh, no, I—" and then Arthur Cooper interrupted fiercely, "What nonsense is this? Winter, is this the story you have told them?"

The boy's eyes twitched in panic.

Rolf said, "He has told us nothing. He still does not remember anything. But it is the only explanation of the facts. He lost his memory because he associated his fiancee with the murderer of his best friend."

Cooper laughed suddenly. "Don't worry, Heath." He turned again to

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Rolf. "What sort of case do you think you are building up? Heath wouldn't harm a fly. Even if Winter did confirm your imaginative reasoning — and that is all it can be — even if he did confirm it, I say, it would prove nothing. He made a mistake."

"He did make a mistake," said Rolf. "His fiancee didn't murder Clyde Parsons. She couldn't have. The crime could not have been committed by a woman of Heath's physique. A man did it, a man powerful enough to overpower a strong victim, force him backward onto a table, and then cut his throat."

Cooper looked shocked. "Then why this picking on Heath —?"

"Just because Donald did make a mistake. Because of the abnormality in the hand. An abnormality which would be an impossible coincidence if shared between her and some stranger — *but one which might be perfectly natural in a blood relative.*"

Heath suddenly buried her face in her hands. The boy's expression did not change. Johnson licked his lips.

Cooper blustered, "Have you now got the impudence to accuse me?"

"Yes. But you can easily prove your innocence if you want to. Are you prepared to grip this length of wood I have here, and let Heath grip it too, so we can compare results?"

"No," said Cooper, and laughed again. "Why should I submit myself to a test which is based entirely on theory — a theory unconfirmed even by the man you say provided the basis of the theory? No, I will not do it, and you cannot compel me to. Nor are you in a position to hold me on suspicion."

"That is quite true," said Rolf meekly, and added, "But there is one other theory on which I am prepared to stand or fall. You see, Mr. Cooper, the name of the murderer is known. It is the same name as a mysterious person who makes a living from blackmail. It is obviously not his real name, and yet there must have been a reason for his choosing it."

Cooper said sarcastically, "What alias am I supposed to have adopted? And what tortuous reason have you concocted for that choice?"

Rolf ignored him. He said, quietly, "Heath, my dear, I am sorry about this — but it may be our only chance to help Donald. Do you mind answering one or two questions?"

"No, Oom."

"I am pleased. Now, listen: You told me last time I was here that Arthur Cooper is your half-brother?"

"Yes."

"You share the same name, and so it would be natural to assume that you shared the same father. But my theory is that the connecting link between you is your mother. I say that your mother was married twice, that Arthur was the son of the first husband, and that he used his stepfather's name when your mother remarried. Am I right or wrong?"

"Right, Oom."

"Then, Heath, do you know the name of your mother's first husband, of Arthur's father?"

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"Yes."

"And what was that name?"

"Prentice."

The door closed on Johnson and his prisoner.

The boy still sat in lethargic fear. Incongruously, a sobbing Heath ran to him for consolation. She put her arm round his shoulders and, barely perceptibly, he flinched. His eyes sought escape.

Beresky and Rolf came to stand in front of him.

Beresky said, "Donald?"

"Yes?"

"You heard the talk in this room? You saw what happened?"

"Yes. But I don't . . . understand. This suspicion of Heath. I don't remember. . . ."

"But you will, Donald, you will. There's just one thing for you to do. Fill your mind with it, Donald. Concentrate. Just on this one point: Heath is innocent. Say it."

"Heath is innocent."

"*Proved* innocent, Donald. You made a mistake. Just a mistake. And Heath is innocent."

The boy's muscles tensed. His head lolled. His lips twisted to form the word *innocent.*

Beresky nodded to Rolf who, suddenly and resonantly, began to recite:

Under hot Constantia broad the vineyards lie;
Throned and thorned the aching berg props the speckless sky;
Slow below the Wynberg firs trails the tilted wain —
Take the flower, and turn the hour, and kiss your love again.

Beresky said, "Think!"

The boy bared his teeth, moaned, and moved his eyes in bafflement.

Rolf said, very slowly, " '*Take the flower, and turn the hour, and kiss your love again.*' "

Winter's face shivered. His muscles moved, twisted, and sagged.

"I remember now," he said.

He came from the shop, dropping the old watch into his left-hand trouser pocket, fitting the new one on his wrist. He adjusted it to the clock on the City Hall, and started to wind. The time was 10:55.

A vague cloud passed through his mind. He should have wound first, of course. Maybe a minute. . . . He looked up again at the City Hall, but something stopped the sweep of his eyes.

A hand. Clutching a balcony rail. But not just any hand. A hand with a strange little finger which stuck out almost at right angles as it gripped. The same hand that had reached out to bludgeon him. The hand that had been red with Clyde Parsons's blood. No doubt about it — he now had the murderer.

The hand moved, turned, bringing the body to which it belonged out of the shadows, showing the face clearly in the shattering light.

Heath.

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He felt his feet shuffling, walking away with him.

He walked to the top of Plein Street. And down again.

Heath.

He thought of her always as a flower, as a white flower, like the heath in the poem. White and pure. *White as sands of Muizenberg.* With white hands. But they had once been red — wet with Clyde's own blood.

He had not sworn an oath — nothing so melodramatic as that. All the same there had been the feeling that if he ever found the murderer. . . .

He had noticed the poster as he passed the first time, and now it seemed to bore into his brain with a new meaning. *Kiss the Blood off My Hands.* Kiss the blood off Heath's hands . . .

He crossed the road with long strides, and bought a ticket from the hard-faced blonde in the box. But somehow the poster drew him. He went to it, peered at the strip pasted across the bottom, and stiffened.

Crime Does Not Pay.

No escape. There it was again.

He wandered, and did not know he was wandering.

He thought of the new watch, and how he had felt about it symbolizing a new life. He stripped the watch off his wrist, and took the old one out of his pocket. And then he saw the lilies.

The poem came back to him. *Buy my heath and lilies.* And here were lilies.

He looked at them, and then again the poem came: — *take the flower.*

He took one. It lay in his right palm, a symbol of purity. And then suddenly the curves of the bloom reminded him of a hand, a white hand, with a strange little finger.

He crushed it.

And became conscious of the watches he held. Old life, new life.

He dropped the new life in the gutter.

But the poem persisted. *Take the flower, and turn the hour, and kiss your love again.*

Kiss your love with the blood-stained hands.

Back, back, back. Back again to where it happened, here on the corner of Plein Street. Only she has gone. There is no hand now on the balcony rail.

And turn the hour.

If only one could. Back to 10:55. And the rest be a dream — yes, that would be a solution. Back to 10:55. And no hand on the balcony rail. No hand to catch his eye as he started looking at the City Hall tower. No hand — because the hand was a dream, and the clock would show 10:55.

But the clock showed 11:47. And his watch?

He put his hand into his pocket, and pulled out an unused movie ticket and a crushed white flower.

He couldn't quite understand it. *He had never seen them before.*

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Another bold-fashioned melodrama by L. J. Beeston, who always seems to have such a riproaring good time when he writes about secret societies, wild justice, and terror in the night. Take a seat, dear reader, at another of Mr. Beeston's London club meetings; become the thirty-fourth guest in a private dining-room at the Hotel Florizel, and listen to a blood-and-thundery after-dinner story told by the corpulent gentleman, with the benign smile, answering to the name of Inspector Hopp . . .

THE HUMAN LEOPARDS

by L. J. BEESTON

THE TALL, LEAN MAN AT THE upper end of the long table, whose dress-shirt kept edging out from his waistcoat and whose red beard glowed like a flame, got up and said: "I propose that we call on our friend, the Inspector, to tell us the story of what happened."

At these words the thirty-three diners up and down the table, in this private room of the Hotel Florizel, made movements and sounds of satisfaction. There were cries of "Hopp! Hopp! Inspector Hopp!"

The corpulent gentleman who was leaning back in his chair, with his fingers on the edge of the table, and the expression of the well-satisfied diner relaxing his features, smiled benignly and said:

"Very well, gentlemen, since you insist, I will tell you all about it." He took a preliminary sip of his liqueur, and went straight forward as follows:

"In accord with my instructions from headquarters, I went down to Chelwood End on the Wednesday of last week. I did not take the car, but the half-past eight train from Baker Street. I chose that way because it was snowing heavily, and I distrusted the state of the roads.

"No one got out at Chelwood End but myself. I went under the railway bridge, climbed a stile on the left, crossed a field, and so into that wood of beeches which has given Chelwood its trifle of reputation. They rise up to the right and left of the path, which is therefore in a little valley. Their sinewy arms, which have the naked-limbed, wrestling appearance of beeches, sagged under the snow upon them, hung without a movement, covered with the delicate white blossom which was descending out of the night.

"The woodland path finishes where a road runs both ways, and just across this road, commanding a view of the avenue, is the house which was my destination. It stands alone — a small place of grayish brick, cheap and ugly, with a wood fence surmounted by twisted iron nails.

"As I approached the house I saw a

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very tall woman with piercing black eyes. She said 'Good evening.' I answered her with the same words, and she vanished, using a peculiar gait, which was more a glide than a walk.

"The little hall was dark. As the sound of my knock rang out, a voice on the other side of the door screamed 'Go away! Go away!' Then came the drawing of a bolt, the letting-down of a chain, and the appearance of a man in a blue dressing-gown with red facings. He carried a small oil lamp, badly-trimmed, and the smoky flare showed me a pale face with untidy hair.

" 'What do you want?' he demanded, querulously.

" 'Are you Mr. Fraser Elgood?' I made answer. 'I am Detective-Inspector Hopp, of police headquarters. Your communication was received.'

"He looked rather scared. 'Oh, yes,' said he. 'Come in. I did not expect anyone until the morning, and was just retiring. This way, please.'

"As I followed him, the same screeching voice let out again: 'Get out of here! Get out of here!' It was a gray parrot in a cage against the wall, and he whetted his beak as if he wanted to rip me up.

"We went into a little room leading from the hall, and he put the lamp upon a table.

" 'I'll light the gas fire,' he said. 'It's rather cold in here, Inspector.'

"It was ice-cold, and his teeth chattered as he spoke. It was obvious that he was suffering from nerves. He fumbled at lighting the stove, and when the flame appeared, only to vanish with a bang, he shouted, 'Oh, blast it!'

" 'Do not trouble,' I begged. 'Before this room is warm I shall have gone.'

" 'Doesn't it matter?' he replied, irritably. 'All right, but, if you'll excuse me, I'll go and put on some more clothes; I am only party dressed, and this frost goes to my bones.'

"Left alone for a little while, I took up the oil lamp and examined the room. I saw at once that although it had not been built as a bedroom, yet it had been used for that purpose. True, there was no bed there, only a Chesterfield against a wall; but in a corner recess was a small chest of drawers with a bedroom swivel-mirror upon it, and a round little washstand on castors in another corner. The window was shrouded with a pair of heavy claret-colored curtains. I tried to look out, but the night pressed up against the panes, and all I could see was a veil of falling snowflakes. Mr. Fraser Elgood was gone a good twenty minutes. When he returned he had not only dressed himself completely, but he had fought the cold in another way, as a quite obvious odor of whiskey told me.

"He felt better, and spoke up at once in a business-like fashion.

" 'I am very pleased indeed to see you, Inspector,' he assured me, drawing a chair up to the table where I was

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sitting. 'I assume that you are acquainted, through my communication to the police, with the not very desirable situation in which I find myself?'

"'Yes; but you can briefly recapitulate the particulars.'

"'I inherited this little property, and £3,000 besides, from a relative who willed it to me,' Elgood began. 'He was my half-brother Edmund. He lived a lonely life here, attending to his own needs, and here he died alone. Four months ago he was missed, and when an anxious neighbor effected an entrance he found Edmund dead on the floor of the kitchen. He had had a fit, and in falling had struck his head against a table.'

"He stopped, his features set in a queer, listening attitude.

"'Was there any suggestion of foul play?' I demanded.

"He pulled himself together. 'The verdict was death from natural causes.'

"'And you were satisfied with that verdict?'

"'I? Oh, I was abroad at the time. I had lived for years in the States — Listen! Do you hear that whistling? It's that cursed parrot. It belonged to Edmund, and one day I'll wring —'

"'You were in America when your half-brother died?' I interrupted. 'You received a letter from a lawyer, I suppose?'

"'No,' he answered. 'For a long time I had been out of touch with him. There was an advertisement in the papers, requesting me, if alive, to communicate with a firm of solicitors, and I saw it. I came to England at once, to this place, where I have lived since.'

"'Alone?'

"'Yes.'

"'I understand that you are not liked, Mr. Elgood?'

"'That is just it,' said he, with smothered anger. 'I am shunned, pointed at, made the subject of unpleasant whispers.'

"'Because you choose to live an isolated existence?'

"He indulged in a minute of sullen silence, then he replied: 'I have an idea — I feel — I *know* that my name and Edmund's death are coupled together.'

"'But that is absurd, seeing that you were thousands of miles away at the time? Surely, Mr. Elgood, you have not sought this interview in order to lodge such a complaint? Mere tittle-tattle —'

"'Curse them all!' he snapped. The whiskey he had drunk was now burning discs of crimson in his cheeks.

"'Come, there is something else,' I urged.

"He looked round uneasily, seemed about to speak, drew his chair a little closer to mine, and suddenly demanded, 'Tell me, Inspector, have you ever heard of the Human Leopards?'

"The startling question was accompanied by a fear that flared up in his eyes.

"'Certainly I have heard of them,'

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I assured him, soothingly. 'The police of the most obscure country know a little about them. It is a peculiarly grim title taken by one of the secret fraternities of the world.'

"He looked relieved. 'I am glad I have not to explain,' said he. 'You are acquainted with their methods?'

" 'Partly. They are a body of idealists, I believe. They acknowledge all laws that are just, but they assert the undeniable fact that there are more scoundrels who manage to keep on the right side of the law than the number who overstep the line. And it is upon the former section that they focus their spotlight — or, rather, the concentrated fire which kills when it touches. Of course, I am speaking figuratively. In plain language, they attend to the rogue, the villain, who smiles at the law, or to the secret criminal who hides from it. Him they kill — him they exterminate ruthlessly.'

" 'They track him down — those leopards!' said Elgood, in a hoarse whisper. 'They seem to scent him like the wild beasts that they are! Are you acquainted with their distinguishing mark, Inspector?'

" 'Perfectly,' I answered, turning back my left sleeve. 'Just here, on the under side of the arm, between the wrist and elbow, they tattoo, roughly, the semblance of a leopard. Where you see that mark, there is one of them; where it is not — well, there is not one of them. Now, why this questioning, Mr. Elgood? Have you an idea that your half-brother was murdered by that strange society?'

"He looked at me queerly. 'Who knows?' he replied.

" 'Or is it possible that you yourself ——'

"I was interrupted by a long, low, chuckling gurgle.

"He sprang up, his nerves quivering. 'I'll kill that confounded thing!' he cried. He rushed out, unhooked the cage from the wall, and I heard him fling it, parrot and all, into some corner. He returned instantly, looking rather ashamed of his want of control.

" 'Mr. Elgood, do you know in which room your half-brother Edmund used to sleep?' I questioned, abruptly.

"He showed surprise as he answered, 'In one of the two back rooms upstairs.'

" 'And you said that he was quite alone in this house?"

" 'Yes, I did say so,' he answered, with a touch of hostility.

" 'Oh, I am not doubting you,' I responded. 'But may I inquire who, if anyone, has occupied his room since?'

" 'I have.'

" 'Then this room in which we are seated was not used as a sleeping chamber?'

" 'No. Why do you ask?'

" 'There are one or two pieces of furniture which would seem to justify my question.'

" 'They have been put here out of the way, that is all.'

" ' I am surprised to hear that,' I

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assured him. 'When you left me here on my arrival, I ventured on certain investigations, and they persuaded me that this room has been occupied as a bedroom, and for a considerable period.'

" 'You are mistaken, Inspector,' he said, firmly.

" 'I do not think so,' I maintained.

" 'May I ask for your evidences?'

" 'I am convinced that a man has slept in this apartment for a long time, I began. 'I should say he was between thirty-five and forty years of age; about five feet eight in height, partly bald, such hair as he has being of a reddish-brown color.'

" 'All that is guess-work,' he mocked. 'What proofs have you?'

" 'Oh, I estimate his approximate height from the angle of that dressing-mirror on the chest of drawers in the recess. The swiveled glass is adjusted to the stature of a man of about the inches I have mentioned. The color of his hair is no mystery, for I found a single hair by the glass. It is of a red-brown. It does not take much discrimination to tell a healthy human hair from an unhealthy. The hair I found is thin and brittle; therefore I assume that the man is partly bald. His age, I admit, is rather a hazardous conjecture. I ventured an estimate because of the unframed photograph of that woman on the mantelpiece. She is a woman of about thirty-five or so, and the man, being engaged to her, might not be so very much older, or younger.'

" 'But who said that he — if he exists — is engaged to the original of that photograph?' he demanded.

" 'My dear sir,' I assured him, 'you will perceive more than one thumb mark on both sides of the picture — the thumb mark, by the way, of a man with unusually small hands; it means that he frequently took up the portrait, and that he often pressed his lips to the lips of the likeness. The trifling moisture has left a perceptible stain there. You will allow that that certainly argues a state of love, and, probably, an engagement.'

" 'You do not lack imagination. Inspector,' said Elgood, with rather a sneer. 'Anything else?'

" 'Yes. He wore a tweed, unlined cap. Then he was a cigarette-smoker, and smoked more than was good for him; also he was rather near-sighted, and required the use of spectacles — for help in reading only, I should say.'

"He looked at me with a little smile playing nervously round his lips. 'It is beyond me, Inspector,' he answered. 'The unlined cap, for instance?'

" 'Easy. He used to hang it on that nail this side of the door. The nail took a shred out; it is still there.'

" 'And the cigarettes?'

" 'The stiff wrappers of the packets he stuffed round the window frames to keep them from rattling on windy nights. The fact that he found it necessary showed that his nerves were weak — he smoked too many.'

" 'How amazingly smart you are, Inspector!'

" 'Not at all.'

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"'And the short-sightedness, with the spectacles for reading only?'

"'Just under the dressing-glass is a bent fragment of wire. It is precisely the piece of wire often used to repair that curve of spectacles that go round the ear. If he *always* wore spectacles it is not likely that he would have put up with such an unsightly makeshift.'

"'You excel yourself, Inspector. But what did he use for a bed?'

"'That Chesterfield. Look at its covering of Utrecht velvet — how worn it is along its length.'

"'Well, have you exhausted the list of your investigations and deductions?'

"'If I had more time I might add to them, but I have pursued the matter far enough to enable me to form a very important conclusion.'

"'And that conclusion, Inspector?' —

"'That Mr. Fraser Elgood was the subject of my theory.'

"'Myself?' he said, quite coolly.

"'Yourself.'

"He drew a deep breath. 'I admit it,' said he. 'I slept here, in this room, throughout the last year of Edmund's life. His hidden guest. I am glad you found out. I wanted to tell you, but could not bring myself to do it.' "

Here the narrator paused, with a genial smile which embraced his entire audience, and he sipped his liqueur.

"Capital, Hopp, capital!" commented the tall, lean man at the head of the long table. With one hand he stroked his red beard, which glowed like a flame, and with the other he pushed in one side of his refractory shirt-front.

"You got Elgood right into a corner, Inspector," praised another.

"Devilishly well worked out," exclaimed a third.

The narrator's smile radiated satisfaction. He put down his glass, cleared his throat, and continued:

"I *do* hand myself a little bouquet," he beamed. "Well, gentlemen, when Elgood had made his admission I waited for his explanation. It seemed satisfactory, though peculiar.

"'I came to my half-brother Edmund's house a fugitive,' said Elgood, with an appearance of frankness. 'I entered it by stealth, secretly, on a night as black as this, with many a look behind to see if death snatched at my heels. For your assumption was correct, Inspector: I had been marked down by those terrors which call themselves the Human Leopards. To escape them I had crossed from one continent to another, but I could not be sure that I had eluded them. No one who comes under the ban of those fiends is ever sure of a single day of life. I fled to Edmund, told him my story, and he gave me shelter. I was convinced that if I had a chance at all I ought not to risk it by showing myself. Edmund agreed. He gave me this room. The curtains were never drawn from the windows. My presence in his house was a secret between the two of us. No other knew of it. I never went out except on dark nights, and kept to solitary paths. I spent a

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whole year in this stealthy fashion. At the end of that time I was certain that I had not been followed to England.

" 'And then, one morning, I found Edmund lying dead — in the kitchen, where he had tumbled down in a fit. I was doubly horrified; his end shocked me, and I saw at once that I was in a great dilemma. Should I run out of the house, call a doctor, announce my presence, then I was doomed. The facts of my secret arrival, and my long unknown stay, must come to light, and, in the tragic circumstances, would cause a sensation. A sensation, as you will understand, was the one thing I had to avoid, for the publicity would bring upon me the attention of my dreaded enemies.'

" 'I chose the only course open to me, Inspector. I left the house, under cover of dark, as secretly as I had entered it. As no one knew I was there, leaving was easy; and a few days later I crossed to America. By that time I had ceased to fear my enemies. I watched the English papers, soon saw myself advertised for — for my half-brother had left me all his property, as I knew — and returned openly. Of course, the one or two advertisements for me were in themselves a mild form of sensation; but I could not avoid that, neither was I disposed to leave this property unclaimed. However, I feel safe enough — except in one particular, and that has nothing to do with my former peril.

" 'I told you that during my long stay here — a stay which your astuteness has revealed to you — I went out only at night, avoiding people. I was successful save on one occasion. A woman once accidentally stumbled against me in a miry path; my hat was knocked off by the collision, and, there being a certain amount of moonlight behind the clouds, she saw my face. It did not seem to matter much; she is a resident in the village, and the incident was very brief, and the light very uncertain. Well, soon after my open return here, I met this woman a second time. I passed her with barely a glance, but you know one can always tell when one is being looked after. Since then I have seen her on one or two other occasions. In her eyes there is suspicion, hostility.'

" 'That is understandable, Mr. Elgood,' I answered. 'If she has an idea that you were here before your brother died, she probably wonders if there is any connection between you and the sudden death which gave you the property. I suppose she has been talking?'

" 'I fear she has. She has breathed her vague suspicions into the air. I see doubtful faces wherever I go; things are being whispered about me, Inspector. Unless something is done, the state of affairs will become intolerable. I may be made the subject of blackmail.'

" 'Very true.'

" 'So you see why I communicated with you. My position is intensely awkward. How can I come into the

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open — with those devils, the Human Leopards, possibly somewhere in the background? What do you advise me to do, Inspector?'

"All his first nervousness had returned; he regarded me with a pale face and haggard eyes.

" 'What is this woman like?' I questioned.

" 'She is exceptionally tall, with piercing dark eyes; her gait is peculiar, being more a glide than a walk.'

" 'You describe an unusual sort of woman,' I answered. 'Has it occurred to you that she perhaps has a purpose somewhat deeper than linking you with Edmund's death?'

"He looked at me open-mouthed. 'Ah!' he muttered. 'I never thought of that. You infer that she may be one of my enemies, Inspector?'

" 'How can I tell? The fraternity calling themselves the Human Leopards — Ah!'

"The parrot's wild screech — 'Go away! Go away!' had interrupted me.

" 'There is someone outside the house?' I questioned.

"He rose with an effort. 'We will see; stand by me, Inspector,' he asked.

"We went into the little hall on the tips of our toes. The parrot, which was lying in a corner, let out a scream of laughter. Elgood prepared to open the door, looking round to see if I was by him.

" 'Now!' I cried.

"Swift as light he flung the door back. We peered forward. In the black wall of the night I seemed vaguely to catch sight of a face, but, if it was there at all, it vanished instantly. I took a swift step, but Elgood gripped me by the arm.

" 'For God's sake do not leave me!' he panted.

"He was horribly afraid.

"The cold of the windless air was intense. The endless files of the snowflakes fell, with not a whisper of sound for all their myriads.

"Elgood drew me back and closed the door. 'Come into the room,' he begged. 'I don't like your hint, Inspector, about that woman being one — one of *those*. If I thought that ——' He broke off, shivering, and we re-entered the room. 'I didn't see anyone outside,' he continued. 'Did you?'

" 'I am not sure.'

" 'That cursed parrot must have heard someone, though,' he added. 'You see what a position I am in, Inspector. What ought I to do?'

" 'Yes,' I agreed, 'you have got yourself into a very queer situation. If you would extricate yourself, you will want more nerve than you are showing.'

"The oil in the lamp was becoming exhausted; with an uncertain hand he turned up the wick, which spluttered angrily.

" 'You are, it seems to me, between two fires,' I went on. 'There is the unpleasant gossip of the neighborhood about your brother's death, and there is this very serious matter of

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your sworn enemies. I am inclined to think that you acted imprudently in returning to this country, but that is a useless regret. Now — this furtive, guessed-at whispering about Edmund's tragic end: you have admitted that you were in the house when it happened; more, that you have benefited considerably by it.'

"He made a movement as if to rise from his chair. 'What!' he exclaimed, angrily, 'do you also insinuate that I killed him?'

" 'You have not denied it.'

" 'Well, I do deny it, here and now, once and forever!' he stormed, leaning forward and hitting the table a blow with his clenched fist. 'Should I have got into touch with the police if I had killed Edmund?'

" 'Nevertheless, I think it will pursue you, as you have complained,' I answered; 'and — you must excuse me for saying this — your admission that you are marked down by the fraternity called the Human Leopards in no way helps to clear you of any charge. As we both know, that ruthless society turns its hand only against the criminal — the wicked whom the orthodox law cannot touch or cannot find. When you say "Those fiends are hunting me" you also say, implicitly, "They have a good reason for so doing." All this is very plain.'

" 'And outside the present discussion,' he answered. 'I tell you, Inspector, I want protection; protection against possible blackmail, and against the assassins who may be on my track.'

" 'I see that my suggestion regarding this woman has made you nervous of her.'

" 'Perhaps it has,' he said, sullenly. 'Do you really think she is one of that gang?'

" 'It is extremely probable,' I answered him. 'And in that case she was perhaps in this neighborhood on the look-out for you during your year of secret residence with Edmund. In that event, her stumbling against you would not be so accidental as it appeared. All the time that you believed yourself safe you may have been shadowed.'

"His face whitened. 'Is it possible?' said he, huskily.

" 'It is almost certain,' I went on. 'Why, if she is as sharp as I consider her to be, your every action may have been under her observation. That letter, now, which you sent to the police ——'

" 'What about it?' he interrupted.

" 'This woman might have intercepted it.'

" 'Intercepted it!' he gasped.

" 'And delivered it to your enemies,' I continued, with slow and intense deliberation. 'So that, instead of Detective-Inspector Hopp coming to see you tonight ——'

"And I finished my sentence by baring my left forearm and sliding off the thin, flesh-colored plaster between wrist and elbow!

"He gave one look and every nerve and muscle in him turned to stone.

" 'Death purges and expiates!' said I, speaking our formula, gentle-

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men; and from my right sleeve I slipped the dagger which is the terrible fang of the Human Leopard!"

The narrator finished his liqueur. There was a hum of great sensation.

"That was an evil heart stopped," said one of the company.

"You played your part well," commented another. "Those evidences in the room: Hopp himself, the real and genuine Hopp could not have bettered those observations and deductions. But since you knew from the start that Elgood was your man, they were not rigidly necessary?"

"It amused me to make them, and to show him the net woven round him."

"And you have told the story well," added a third speaker. "Not without a touch of grimness — Inspector."

"Ah, 'Inspector' is good," smiled the long, lean man at the head of the table. He gave his shirt-front a final adjustment, and as he went to the door his beard glowed like a flame. He jerked the door open with suddenness, after pulling aside the heavy portiere, and looked to right and left for a possible eavesdropper; but there was nobody in this below-street-level of the hotel corridor, save a passing servant or two.

"Gentlemen," said he, returning, "we held our last functional banquet in Vienna; this one here in London; and next year we will choose another locale. That will be safest and best. Shall we now break up?"

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HARD CASE

by ROBERT ARTHUR

OLD MAN MORRIS WAS KNOWN AS a hard case. When his only boy, Harry, on his eighteenth birthday was held up and shot while bringing back the sale money for an exceptionally fine lot of cattle, Old Man Morris showed no emotion. He made no threats, gave way to no grief, and when an investigation turned up no clue to the murderer's identity, he went back to carrying on the necessary work on his small and lonely ranch.

The killing of Harry Morris turned out not to be an isolated instance. In the year following it, three more men were shot down in the Cochino River country, and two of them were carrying money at the time. The third, a rancher named Ike Carter, who had just previously left a large sum in the care of a friend, was found with six bullets in his head and chest — indicating that the killer, failing to find the expected booty, had emptied his gun into his victim in a fit of vicious temper.

But this was a slim clue to his identity, and no more revealing one was uncovered. The sheriff was old, and his blood ran thin. He merely sat and fretted. His two deputies, Sam Parr and Joe Green, though willing, lacked the instinct of the manhunter. They were energetic and covered a lot of territory in their search, but in a year they still had picked up nothing pointing to the identity of the murderer. So men who had to transport money in the Cochino River country no longer traveled alone.

Old Man Morris, however, when fortune for the first time in his life smiled on him, made no concession to a lifelong rule by asking for or accepting help in guarding his wealth.

The good fortune consisted of an unexpected offer for a small parcel of Oklahoma oil land that had been his wife's. Long disregarded, it had taken on value, and the check Old Man Morris cashed in the Cochino Center bank, translated into greenbacks, made an impressive appearance.

Old Man Morris, as he had shown no emotion at bad fortune, showed none at good. He took the bills the cashier counted out to him, made a tight roll the size of his thumb, and snapped a rubber band around it. Buttoning the money into his shirt pocket, he spent the early part of the afternoon doing some necessary shopping, and then set out in his buckboard for the thirty-mile drive homeward.

The sheriff made a vain attempt to get him to leave the money at the

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bank, since the whole county by now knew about it, or at least to get someone to ride along with him for protection. Old Man Morris was adamant, and shaking his head direly, the sheriff desisted. With no protection except an ancient ten-gauge shotgun, carrying a charge of buckshot sufficient to tear a man in half, the old rancher slapped his team across the flanks and got under way.

He was three hours out of Cochino Center, crossing an alkali barren with night only an hour or so off, when the figure of a man on horseback appeared ahead of him.

Old Man Morris reached for his shotgun. Then, coming closer, he saw that the man was Sam Parr, the sheriff's deputy, and he relinquished his hold on the weapon.

Sam Parr held his place until the buckboard came up. Then he walked his horse alongside.

"I had a tip a stranger had been seen along this flank of Hermit Mountain," he told Old Man Morris. "I mentioned it to the sheriff, and he asked me if I'd mind coming out to scout around a bit, and sort of see you past this stretch anyway. I came over the Rocky Trail while you were pulling around. Haven't seen sign of anyone, though."

"Thanks," Old Man Morris said laconically.

"Town talk's you have a whale of a lot of money on you. You ain't afraid to be carryin' it alone through this country?" Sam Parr asked curiously.

"Why should I be?" the rancher asked. He touched the shotgun beside him. "I got Old Andy Jackson here. Buckshot loaded. Blow a man in half." He paused, spat to one side into the alkali. "Has, too."

"But suppose this fellow who's been doing these killings waylaid you?" Sam Parr persisted. "Shot you from behind a rock, like he did your boy Harry?"

At the mention of his son, Old Man Morris's faded blue eyes took on a dark and angry color, but his seamed features did not alter and his tone was even.

"Wouldn't do him no good," he said. "I got my money hid. Hid where no living man is going to find it."

"You mean along the trail?"

The rancher shook his head.

"You mean on you?"

Old Man Morris nodded. "You could look for a week and not find it," he said, not boastfully but as a man stating fact. Then he added, "But Harry wasn't waylaid. He was shot from close up. There were powder marks on his face. He was shot by somebody he knew, and didn't suspicion, or he wouldn't 'a' let let them get so close."

The team's hooves sounded louder. A moment later the wheels of the buckboard were rattling over a long rocky outcropping. Sam Parr had pulled his horse casually to the right of the vehicle. Abruptly now he reined up close to Old Man Morris, and before the rancher could guess

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his intentions had drawn the .45 in his holster.

"You're right about that, old man!" he exclaimed, his tone changing. "I shot him. Keep your hand away from that shotgun!"

Old Man Morris drew back his hand. Sam Parr leaned over and jerked the shotgun from its brackets, sat with it balanced across the horn of his saddle.

"Now," he ordered, "fork over the money."

The old rancher made no move. The stare he gave the deputy was level.

"So it's you, Sam," he commented. "I wasn't sure. Didn't know but maybe it was Joe Green. Knew it had to be somebody Harry recognized and wouldn't suspicion. Figured it out you two boys had the best excuses for goin' and comin' without nobody keepin' track of you."

"Never mind the gabble," Sam Parr told him curtly. "Hand over the money."

"Find it," Old Man Morris invited. "If you can." And he spat down onto the rock.

Sam Parr cursed. Then he dismounted, laid the ancient ten-gauge against a rock, and keeping the rancher covered with his .45, trussed him up with a coil of rope from the back of the buckboard.

After that he hunted for the money.

Forty minutes later, panting from his exertions, he quit. Old Man Morris's supplies were scattered across the rocky waste. The deputy had ripped open the flour sacks and spilled their contents, emptied the bags of coffee, and searched the beans and bacon. He had gone over the buckboard inch by inch, harness and all. He had of course searched the rancher first of all.

But he had found nothing. The roll of greenbacks Old Man Morris had got from the bank was still hidden.

Breathing heavily, his face flushed, the renegade deputy took up the shotgun and remounted.

"I want that money, Morris," he said between his teeth. "Tell me where you've cached it or I'll blow you all over the desert."

Old Man Morris shrugged as well as he could, considering the cocoon of rope he was wound in.

"Go ahead," he invited. "Shoot. But you'll never find the money. That's one thing you won't get."

Sam Parr's teeth clamped down. A little blue vein appeared in his forehead.

"By heaven, I will!" he bellowed.

He swung Old Man Morris's shotgun to his shoulder, braced himself for the kick of the heavily loaded old weapon, and pulled the trigger.

The ancient gun gave a terrific roar, and belched a pall of smoke into his face. An instant later Sam Parr was lying on the rock, and his horse was bolting.

Old Man Morris looked down at the mangled, bleeding man, twisting and moaning, and his expression did not change.

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"I could prob'ly save your life, if I was free," he commented, beginning to squirm and wriggle inside his bonds.

The blast had gone off within inches of Sam Parr's face. But he could still form words with his lips.

"You —" he whispered hoarsely.

"Sure," Old Man Morris told him. "Me. I done it. I was laying for you. I knew I wouldn't never get no legal proof, so I baited a trap an' let you walk into it.

"You see, Sam, I knowed from the way the killer filled Ike Carter with lead when he found Ike didn't have his money on him that he had a crazy mean streak of temper in him. So I figgered the idea of blowing me in half with my own shotgun would appeal to him when he got mad enough. Also, I knew if the killer was you or Joe, I wouldn't have no proof of it till too late to make a move myself. So I had to let you trap yourself, if I didn't want to risk shootin' th' wrong man.

"Of course I knowed the shotgun would explode. Like I say, I figgered on it. What? How could I be sure you wouldn't find th' money first, an' then just plug me an' ride off? Easy enough, Sam. I hid my roll in the barrel of the shotgun, just ahead of the charge."

The man on the ground tried to say something more, but the words would not come from a mouth that was half gone. A fresh gush of blood came instead, and Sam Parr fell back.

Old Man Morris, busy struggling with the knots that bound him, looked down on the dying man, his face expressing no emotion whatever.

The Cochino River country knew him as a hard case.

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MY DETECTIVE STORY

'Twas plainly murder. Gun and knife
Were used to end the victim's life.
The body, chapter one revealed,
Was in a room securely sealed,
But murderer and knife and gun
Had disappeared. A hot cross bun
Was left behind; the only clue.
With that I started chapter two.
I made my private eye so keen
That nothing passed by him unseen,
But he found evidence so slim
The mystery even baffled him.
I sent him chasing round about
On tips that always petered out.
The cleverest men of Scotland Yard
Gave up and called the case too hard.
I left no foot or fingerprint
That might have given the cops a hint.
Whatever clues came in proved cold.
And when at last my tale was told,
So veiled with mystery I'd spun it,
I didn't know myself: "Who done it."

— Edgar A. Guest

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Jane McClure was born in New York City in 1924, and spent her pre-school years in transition from Scarsdale to the Bronx. She attended Hunter College for a year, then went to Washington, D. C., where she was graduated from Trinity College. Later she studied at Catholic University, doing assorted Drama work and preparing for an M.A. in Psychology. The M.A. never materialized, and for the best reason in the world: she left the university to marry Bill McClure, a camera correspondent for CBS-TV. There followed three happy years in the Middle East and Europe — Berlin, for the most part, where Mr. and Mrs. McClure tried to find the answers to certain post-war questions, and, like so many others, failed. Before her prize-winning story could appear in EQMM, the McClures, with daughter Cathy and son Bobby, headed back for Europe — Paris, this time — where husband Bill became coordinator of CBS television-film coverage . . .

This rather skimpy biography of Mrs. McClure has omitted what are probably the most interesting details. For example, she has been a card filer at the Library of Congress, a chorus girl at the Earle Theatre in Washington, D. C., a speech teacher, and a decoder in the State Department. If that diversity of background doesn't qualify a person with talent for a writer's career, then we don't know a story from a stone . . . except, on second thought, there are (as the greatest of them all once wrote) sermons in stones. Yes, there is a kind of sermon in Mrs. McClure's story, for "Dark Interlude" deals with an important problem in modern living — a problem that you read about with horror when it makes the headlines of your daily newspaper . . .

DARK INTERLUDE

by JANE McCLURE

Our lives are merely strange dark interludes . . . — EUGENE O'NEILL

WHEN CATHERINE GERONECK NOticed that she had been wringing her hands again, she made an effort to control them, and laid them down very quietly in her lap.

Watching Stacia and George, now poised for a moment before the mantel — her daughter biting her painted lip, her husband narrowing brown eyes at the clock — she wondered if they were not plotting to send her back to the hospital a day earlier; if the canary were to be returned to its

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barred cage and the flowered coverlet lowered before it could alarm with its yellow flutter or tangle with brittle legs. It might even, she speculated, turning her head, fly away through the half-open window at her side. The window had been open then, she remembered, thinking of the summer day, a month before Stacia's wedding, when she had been seated as she was now, and had gazed out into the sun-bright garden where the gentleman wearing the silk hat and suspenders had stood with ladder and rope with which to string her up. And they had told her the man she had seen with the sun on his rope-clasping hand was a figment; yet because she had seen him and told of him, they had taken her to a white-painted room, always locked, with a bed and a washstand, and another window with sparkling panes where she could sit and watch for him to come again.

"Go right ahead to dinner, Stacy, and don't worry about the baby," George was saying, as he strode back and forth before the fire, occasionally cutting off its glow with the great bulk of his body. Catherine could see that there was no longer a golden watch chain suspended from her husband's vest pockets, and that instead of the diamond stickpin there were only a few scattered soup stains to decorate his tie. He had lost them long ago, she recalled, on a thin strip of tickertape in 1929, which had also spelled out the end of their expensive romance and left it lying in paper coils in the bottom of the office wastebasket. Allowing her eyes to wander across the smoky room she saw that only the furniture remained, faded and chipped, and now pulled close in a circle before the fire.

"Let's see," Stacy replied, "it's six-thirty now . . . Seven-thirty, eight-thirty, nine-thirty" — she marked the hours on her fingertips — "she should sleep until eleven, and I'll be back before then."

Catherine thought of the gurgling red-faced baby upstairs drawing forth smiles and kisses and warm caressing songs from those who bent over its traveling cot. She had not expected the baby; babies did not travel from New York to Chicago when she was young.

Catherine moved her head a bit. She fancied she heard the sound of the sea outside, just below the window sills, where the garden should have been. She caught herself. It was the wind, after all, breaking through the autumn birch leaves in steady waves. Strange how the sounds played tricks on her these days. But then again, she had noticed that the sounds played tricks on George as well. He didn't hear as well as he used to. She would wait and play a trick on George.

"I really don't know if I should leave," Stacy said, and Catherine felt her daughter's anxious eyes turn toward her. She looked away to avoid seeing the expression. "I'll look in once more and see if she's asleep."

Catherine waited until she could

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hear the light sound of the footsteps on the floor above; then she said in a very soft voice, "George . . . George . . . George."

George stared ahead into the fire.

"George," she called quite loudly.

"What is it, Kit?" he asked quickly.

"Nothing," she answered, trying to keep down the laughter that rocked within her. She felt better now that she had played her trick.

"Sound asleep," Stacy announced, as she reappeared in the living room. "She won't disturb you, mother. You needn't do a thing." The tone held more warning than assurance. "I *would* like to see these people . . . since I'll be leaving tomorrow. You don't mind, sweet?"

Pursing her dry lips, Catherine shook her head. What did it matter? She had known from the first that Stacy had been anxious to get away, to have the visit over with, to go home. Scanning her daughter's face she followed the cream-colored skin to its sharp point of chin and then the curve of her neck until it disappeared behind the ruffled folds of her blouse. Sadly, she noted the hard lines about the lips and the almost casual blue eyes. She would like to have asked Stacy if she were wearing another face, a carefully powdered, brightly lipsticked one, but she knew that such a question would be out of order. The hospital had taught her that much, the wisdom of dividing her mind into two compartments: one holding the things she could say, the other, the things she could think but must be careful not to voice. And the hospital had warned her what to expect . . .

"It will be difficult," Dr. Sachs had suggested to her before she left, sitting behind the mahogany desk with the noon sunlight warming the white shoulders of his jacket, "so don't expect too much. People . . . even families," he added leaning toward her slightly, "can be cruel without meaning to be." He rose and came around the desk. "Now I don't want you to go home for three days if it is going to upset you."

"Three days!" she echoed incredulously, placing her fingertips against her temples. "Do I have permission to stay three days?"

"Do you want permission, Mrs. Geroneck?" he asked, with a voice tone which commanded reply. "You've come a long way since those first days, and in a few more months you'll be leaving for good . . ."

"I . . . I . . ." she began feeling the fear inflate itself within her. "Yes," she finally answered, looking at him directly, "I have a daughter, you know. She's coming down to see me . . . and I'm needed at home."

"I see," he answered, nodding his head slightly. "In that case, you'll find it will be a good thing. But take it all calmly . . . in your stride."

"I have a picture," she had said, fumbling in her sewing bag and presenting him with the worn photo. She watched him turn it over in his hand. "My daughter."

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"This is the picture of a child, Mrs. Geroneck," he remarked. "I thought your daughter was married."

"Well, she is . . . but this is the only picture I have . . ."

Turning her head away, Catherine noticed that there were now tears coursing down the window panes even as her own tears had for so many years streamed down her cheeks. Stacy! Stacy! Where are you?

"Now, the bottles are in the icebox . . ." Stacy was saying in curt, staccato tones, directing all her instructions to George, but giving her an occasional glance for politeness' sake; but no more. Her coat was almost completely buttoned now, and Catherine watched her as she stooped to straighten the seams of her stockings. She pulled the brim of her felt hat low over her forehead as Catherine turned her cheek to catch the quick kiss and the fragrance of gardenia which lingered until the door had closed.

"Come over and sit by me, Kit," George suggested, and he placed a firm hand along her shoulder.

"Don't touch me, George," she answered, recoiling. Standing up, she felt a shiver go through her body.

"All right, Kit," George replied reassuringly, watching her with a half-quizzical smile on his lips. He shook his head. "Don't worry, I'm not going to touch you." His back was to her now, bending over the radio. She listened for the soft click and the blare of the music, and watched him as he eased himself down upon the couch cushions, put his glasses on, carefully lit another cigar, and rattled the evening paper out before him. "We'll just sit here, you and I, and wait for Stacy to come back . . . and if the favorite grandchild awakens, we'll take care of her."

Within a few minutes he was lost in the news of the day. Looking down at him, Catherine could see that his face was red from the fire and that his eyes were already beginning to water from the cigar smoke which seeped behind the lenses of his glasses. He'd won Stacia away from her, she decided, conceding him the victory in their long subtle struggle for the child's attentions. Hail the winner!

Catherine walked one step forward, and no sooner had she done so than the mirror caught her. She should have known. It had been waiting for her there all evening, she realized, peering with hypnotic attention at the face before her, a face the color of clay with sharp cheekbones which held the sagging skin. From the high wrinkled forehead a mass of gray hair sprang out in disorder, and the eyes were large, dark, and without expression. Tricks again. She knew her own face well, and wondered what the mirror had done with the image of her sun-colored hair and bright hazel eyes.

"I'm tired, George," she announced flatly, as she sat down on the edge of the armchair. "I think I'll go to bed."

"Good idea, Kit," he agreed. "You must be worn out."

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It *had* been a strain and she felt relieved that she would be returning to the even pattern of the hospital in the morning. It was hard for her to realize that it had only been three days since she had come and waited with her back against the screen door until Stacy's taxi had drawn up, and she had watched with eager eyes as her daughter emerged carrying a soft pink bundle in her arms.

"Why, darling!" Stacy had exclaimed, "What a surprise to find you home!" But Stacy had not been able to fool her as she had caught immediately the first notes of alarm in her voice.

"I've come to take care of you," she explained, placing her arm about Stacy's nervous shoulders.

"Thanks, my sweet, but I'm a big girl now, you know," she answered, indicating the baby. "What do you think of your grandchild?"

And that had been the end of it. They had sat her down by the window in an old tapestried chair from which she could watch the sun shifting through the net curtains, and beyond, could see the falling acorns, and the graceful ferns, still green, but soon to be turned into fishbones by the coming snow. All this as the days slipped by, while Stacy moved about the house preparing meals, making beds, bringing warm milk to her at night.

"Stacy!" she whispered one night, as her daughter stood at the bedroom door, one hand upon the light switch. "Come here."

"Yes?" Stacy said, moving closer.

"You can tell me your troubles," she had suggested, watching her daughter's shadow against the wall.

"But I don't have any troubles, darling," Stacy answered lightly, ". . . cross my heart and hope to die." And she had raised her head to see her daughter's face, but Stacy had moved again and was standing with her back towards her, fiddling with the flowers on the dresser.

"Don't you have anything to tell me?" she repeated, hoping she was phrasing her questions correctly. "Anything . . . that's worrying you?"

"Me? Why, mother, I haven't a worry in the world." And she had watched her daughter disappear around the edges of the doorway.

Catherine was suddenly distracted by the sound of someone tapping ever so lightly at the windows. Perhaps it was Stacy returning early. When she turned her eyes she saw that it was only the wind, coming again with a handful of golden leaves to paste against the wet panes. She walked away. She didn't like being watched, even by the leaves.

"Are you all right, Kit?" George asked, looking up at her.

"Yes, George," she answered, placing her foot along the step, "I'm all right." And she gave him a little weasel smile.

When Catherine awoke she wondered where she was. There was no flat white-painted ceiling like the

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one to which she had grown accustomed, and there were no huge uncovered light bulbs stationed in even rows across it. The ceiling was a softer color — eggshell, she supposed — with some sort of chandelier suspended from the center.

Had her punishment ceased, she wondered, looking at the pale pink color of the walls, the lace doily on the dresser, and the flowers drooping over the rim of the glass tumbler? Or was it a ruse? She lay back and sighed. He would be in soon with his calm voice and his questions — the doctor as he called himself . . .

"What day were you born, Mrs. Geroneck?" he had asked that first time. She tried to remember. When was it? In the spring perhaps. There had been a budding tree beside her window and short-legged birds with soft feathers had stopped from time to time along the ledge on their way to their nests. And she had answered that when she was born was of no consequence; it was only the date of her death that she demanded.

"Who is the President of the United States?" he had asked, and she had told him that George was undoubtedly the President by now, that George had always been President, of a paper mill, of the nation, of all the world. Yes, George was undoubtedly President by now. And he had nodded, the supposed doctor, as though he understood. Sometimes she had even thought that he did understand, but life had taught her never to trust anyone.

"Tell me about your father," he had suggested, sitting on the edge of her bed.

"I was his favorite daughter," she had replied, remembering how she used to sit on his shoulders, a child with black-banged hair, with her brown-stockinged legs wrapped about his waist, and her fingers clenched in his hair for support. "And how is my girl tonight?" as he cascaded her down into his arms and let her roll like a yellow ball along the rug, her dress shooting over her head, her garters snapping. She pressed her lips into a smile as she thought of the kisses and presents that she had received. But then, she recalled, driving her fingernails against her palms, there had been the time she had asked at table for another piece of cake, and had been granted it, and more, for he had bought her an entire cake when the guests had left, and forced her to eat it all until she had vomited. Children were to be seen and not heard.

"And your mother?" . . . And a picture of her mother appeared as she was one night before Easter, sewing, making coats for all of them, working over an old machine until she caught her thin finger under its needle. "I see no need to tell you of my mother," she answered sharply.

He had questioned her many times, coming when she was resting, or calling her away from her hospital work to catch her off guard, forcing into her mind, even though she didn't answer, all the old pictures, of egret hats and

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wedding dresses, of babies long since dead, of awkward embraces, of coffins. But no one could answer her question of why, when one willed death, it did not come, softly, leaving a smile and hands folded over a rosary.

She turned in bed and brushed aside the blue cover. She reached for her white bedside table where they allowed her to keep her glasses and her soap and sewing things, but even that was gone. She let her head fall back against the pillows and staring at the ceiling noticed a cobweb there.

She noticed too that the door was ajar, and that there were no bars on the windows. She rose and followed the path of light into the hall where there was the sound of a baby crying. She listened and it seemed to her that it was a voice out of the past. To all appearances, if one could trust appearances, it could be her own baby calling to her, her own Stacy, lying bundled in her crib, whom she had been seeking for so many years. She listened.

She turned and looked around the hall. No one was there. There were no shrill old ladies demanding to be fed, or posturing quiet ones looking like sleeping pelicans; there wasn't even the endless sound of the keys, or a snore, a scream, or a wild song. Only the whining, and at the far end of a flight of steps, the sound of music. She tried one door, but it led to an empty room. She moved farther down the hall, passed a bathroom, and tried another door which was also unlocked. There, in a white crib against the wall, lay her baby, crying out to her.

She felt herself weeping, but she knew that she must hold on. It might be a trick to touch an old memory. She felt the child's face and arms. She turned down the coverlet and watched the reddish legs spring up.

"There, there," she said soothingly, as she cradled it and felt it squirm against her. "There, there." This was surely no trick. The baby was her own. A mother could make no mistake about her own child. But why was it screaming so? Then it came to her that it was hungry. Perhaps the nurse was already on her way with a bottle, and she remembered how she would test it against her wrist.

And it would need a bath, too. Why had she not thought of it sooner? In a moment, aware of her duties, she was alert. She came to life, now that she was needed, unsnapping safety pins, pulling off the shirt, removing the diaper. It only took her a moment to enter the bathroom and turn on the water in the tub — she was careful to see that it was not too hot — and to tie a towel about her waist, and to place the soap easily within reach. She was surprised that she felt so happy.

Her heart was pounding as she lay the baby in the tub, and within her was a tremendous joy as she eased the splashing water over its wriggling body and watched its delight.

"Catherine!" she heard suddenly. "Catherine!" It was a rough tone and it frightened her. It came from downstairs and it rose above the music. Perhaps someone was coming to take

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her child away. Just now . . . at this moment . . . after searching so long.

"Coming," she answered, deciding it was better to investigate. Removing the towel from her waist, she folded it, turned and followed the sound of the voice to the floor below . . .

"Kitty," George said as she entered the room, "why are you puttering around upstairs when you have a perfectly good husband down here? I thought you were going to bed."

"Oh, it's only you, George," Catherine answered in surprise.

"Who did you think it was, Kit?" he asked, picking up the burned-out cigar which had fallen to the floor.

"I . . . I . . . don't remember," Catherine said after a while. Looking at the window she saw that the leaves had dried against the panes and were now dropping backwards on an arm of wind, to fall along the garden grass.

"Did you sleep at all?" he asked.

"Yes," Catherine said, "I had a little nap."

"I think I must have dropped off too," George remarked, bending to relight his cigar. The paper was crumpled beside him.

Catherine sat down opposite George on the couch, and they waited together like two worn and smoky andirons before the fire, exhausted now into gray embers which flared suddenly red when the door opened.

"Well, I thought you'd be in bed," Stacy said, pulling at her suede gloves. Above her head in the open doorway, Catherine could see the moon in the sky, watching her.

"I feel better," Catherine announced, giving her daughter a smile. "A little sleep was just what I needed." And it was true. She felt better than she had earlier, with her mind still echoing with dream, indistinct, unrecallable, but pleasant. In the morning she knew that she would be able to tell the doctor without hesitation that she had had a good visit.

"And there wasn't any need to worry," George added, turning to Stacy. "Not a peep from upstairs."

"Good. I'll fix some coffee." And then there was the sound of Stacy's high heels tripping into the kitchen.

Catherine rose and crossed the room to the window. As she parted the curtains a panel of light pointed to the garden where the leaves, animated by the wind, circled in dance below the tangled willows, then scattered across the grass, and when the wind died, fluttered to rest behind the moss-backed tree trunks. It was quiet now except for the scratching of the branch tips on the slate rooftop, and within the room, the music.

"Do we need this?" Stacy asked when she returned with the coffee cups. George shook his head, and Stacy snapped the radio off. She put the tray down on a small table before making one more trip to the kitchen.

"By the way," Catherine heard her daughter say as she paused, the cream pitcher in one hand, against the arch which led to the dining room, "is somebody taking a bath upstairs? I hear the water running."

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In Harvey Breit's "Success, It's Wonderful!" (in the New York Times Book Review of December 3, 1950), Samuel Shellabarger asked some extremely interesting questions. Mr. Shellabarger, as you know, is one of the most versatile of contemporary authors: he is a well-known historical novelist, the author of bestselling popular novels, a distinguished scholar and schoolmaster, and under the pseudonym of John Esteven, a detective-story writer. Asked to comment on the success of his CAPTAIN FROM CASTILLE *and* THE KING'S CAVALIER, *Mr. Shellabarger wrote as follows to Harvey Breit: "You say that quality is often equated with the unpopular. What constitutes literary quality? And to what critics are we to turn for a definition? Does one look for a like quality in humorous as in serious fiction, in the detective story as in the novel of manners . . . ?"*

The answer to the last question, it has always seemed to us, is very simple: within the framework of each genre, yes. Yes, one has a perfect right to look for quality in all forms of writing — including the detective story.

For example, here is a crime story by Aldous Huxley. Does it have quality? We leave it to you . . . but speaking for ourselves, we know of no more devastating characterization of a nouveau riche, no more persuasive characterization of a glib and foxy art dealer, in all modern literature . . .

THE PORTRAIT

by ALDOUS HUXLEY

"PICTURES," SAID MR. BIGGER, "YOU want to see some pictures? Well, we have a very interesting mixed exhibition of modern stuff in our galleries at the moment. French and English, you know."

The customer held up his hand, shook his head. "No, no. Nothing modern for me," he declared in his pleasant northern English. "I want real pictures, old pictures. Rembrandt and Sir Joshua Reynolds and that sort of thing."

"Perfectly." Mr. Bigger nodded. "Old Masters. Oh, of course, we deal in the old as well as the modern."

"The fact is," said the other, "that I've just bought a rather large house — a Manor House," he added in impressive tones.

Mr. Bigger smiled; there was an ingenuousness about this simple-

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minded fellow which was most engaging. He wondered how the man had made his money. "A Manor House." The way he had said it was really charming. Here was a man who had worked his way up from serfdom to the lordship of a manor, from the broad base of the feudal pyramid to the narrow summit. His own history and all the history of classes had been implicit in that awed, proud emphasis on the "Manor." But the stranger was running on; Mr. Bigger could not allow his thoughts to wander further. "In a house of this style," he was saying, "and with a position like mine to keep up, one must have a few pictures. Old Masters, you know: Rembrandts and what's-his-names."

"Of course," said Mr. Bigger, "An Old Master is a symbol of social superiority."

"That's just it," cried the other beaming; "you've said just what I wanted to say."

Mr. Bigger bowed and smiled. It was delightful to find someone who took one's little ironies as sober seriousness.

"Of course, we should need Old Masters only downstairs, in the reception room. It would be too much of a good thing to have them in the bedrooms, too."

"Altogether too much of a good thing," Mr. Bigger assented.

"As a matter of fact," the Lord of the Manor went on, "my daughter — she does a bit of sketching. And very pretty it is. I'm having some of her things framed to hang in the bedrooms. It's useful having an artist in the family. Saves you buying pictures. But, of course, we must have something old downstairs."

"I think I have exactly what you want." Mr. Bigger got up and rang the bell. *My daughter does a little sketching* — he pictured a large blonde barmaidish personage, 39 and not yet married, running a bit to seed. . . . His secretary appeared at the door. "Bring me the Venetian portrait, Miss Pratt, the one in the back room. You know which I mean."

Miss Pratt nodded and disappeared.

"You're very snug in here," said the Lord of the Manor, looking round the room. Mr. Bigger's sanctum was austerely luxurious. "Business good, I hope." He genuinely did hope it. He liked this fellow. He was sympathetic. He understood things almost before you had begun to explain.

Mr. Bigger sighed. "The slump," he said. "We art dealers feel it worse than anyone."

"Ah, the slump." The Lord of the Manor chuckled. His round, red, shining face shone with mirth. "I foresaw it all the time. Some people seemed to think the good times were going to last forever. What fools! I sold out of everything at the crest of the wave. That's why I can buy pictures now."

Mr. Bigger laughed, too. This was the right sort of customer. "Wish I'd had anything to sell out during the boom," he said.

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The Lord of the Manor laughed till the tears rolled down his cheeks. He was still laughing when Miss Pratt re-entered the room. She carried a picture shieldwise, in her two hands, before her.

"Put it on the easel, Miss Pratt," said Mr. Bigger. "Now," he turned to the Lord of the Manor, "what do you think of that?"

The picture that stood on the easel before them was a half-length portrait. Plump-faced, white-skinned, high-bosomed in her deeply scalloped dress of blue silk, the subject of the picture seemed a typical Italian lady of the Middle Eighteenth Century. A little complacent smile curved the pouting lips, and in one hand she held a black mask, as though she had just taken it off after a day of carnival.

"Very nice," said the Lord of the Manor; but he added doubtfully, "it isn't very like Rembrandt, is it? It's all so clear and bright. Generally in Old Masters you can never see anything at all, they're so dark and foggy."

"Very true," said Mr. Bigger. "But not all Old Masters are like Rembrandt."

"I suppose not." The Lord of the Manor seemed hardly to be convinced.

"This is Eighteenth Century Venetian. Their color was always luminous. Giangolini was the painter. He died young, you know. Not more than half a dozen of his pictures are known. And this is one."

The Lord of the Manor nodded. He could appreciate the value of rarity.

"One notices at a first glance the influence of Longhi," Mr. Bigger went on airily. "And there is something of the morbidezza of Rosalba in the painting of the face."

The Lord of the Manor was looking uncomfortably from Mr. Bigger to the picture and from the picture to Mr. Bigger. There is nothing so embarrassing as to be talked at by someone possessing more knowledge than you do. Mr. Bigger pressed his advantage.

"Curious," he went on, "that one sees nothing of Tiepolo's manner in this. Don't you think so?"

The Lord of the Manor nodded. His face wore a gloomy expression. The corners of his baby's mouth drooped. One almost expected him to burst into tears.

"It's pleasant," said Mr. Bigger, relenting at last, "to talk to somebody who really knows about painting. So few people do."

"Well, I can't say I've ever gone into the subject very deeply," said the Lord of the Manor, modestly. "But I know what I like when I see it." His face brightened again, as he felt himself on safer ground.

"A natural instinct," said Mr. Bigger. "That's a very precious gift. I could see by your face that you had it; I could see that the moment you came into the gallery."

The Lord of the Manor was delighted. "Really now," he said. He felt himself growing larger, more

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important. "Really." He cocked his head critically on one side. "Yes. I must say, I think that's a very fine bit of painting. Very fine. But the fact is, I should rather have liked a more historical piece, if you know what I mean. Something more ancestor-like, you know. A portrait of somebody with a story — like Anne Boleyn or Nell Gwynn or the Duke of Wellington or someone like that."

"But, my dear sir, I was going to tell you. This picture has a story." Mr. Bigger leaned forward and tapped the Lord of the Manor on the knee. His eyes twinkled with benevolent and amused brightness under his bushy eyebrows. There was a knowing kindliness in his smile. "A most remarkable story is connected with the painting of that picture."

"You don't say so?" The Lord of the Manor raised his eyebrows.

Mr. Bigger leaned back in his chair. "The lady you see there," he said, indicating the portrait with a wave of the hand, "was the wife of the fourth Earl Hurtmore. The family is now extinct. The ninth earl died only last year. I got this picture when the house was sold. It's sad to see the passing of these old ancestral homes." Mr. Bigger sighed. The Lord of the Manor looked solemn, as though he were in church.

There was a moment's silence; then Mr. Bigger went on in a changed tone. "From his portraits, which I have seen, the fourth Earl seems to have been a long-faced, gloomy, gray-looking fellow. One can never imagine him young; he was the sort of man who looks permanently 50. His chief interests in life were music and Roman antiquities. There's one portrait of him holding an ivory flute in one hand and resting the other on a fragment of Roman carving. He spent at least half his life traveling in Italy, looking for antiquities and listening to music. When he was about 55 he suddenly decided that it was about time to get married. This was the lady of his choice." Mr. Bigger pointed to the picture.

"His money and his title must have made up for many deficiencies. One can't imagine, from her appearance, that Lady Hurtmore took a great deal of interest in Roman antiquities. Nor, I should think, did she care much for the science and history of music. She liked clothes, she liked society, she liked gambling, she liked flirting, she liked enjoying herself. It doesn't seem that the newly wedded couple got on too well. But still, they avoided an open breach.

"A year after the marriage Lord Hurtmore decided to pay another visit to Italy. They reached Venice in the early autumn. For Lord Hurtmore, Venice meant unlimited music. It meant Galuppi's daily concerts at the orphanage of the Misericordia. It meant Piccini at Santa Maria. It meant new operas at the San Moise; it meant delicious cantatas at a hundred churches. It meant private concerts of amateurs; it meant Porpora and the finest singers in Europe; it meant Tartini and the greatest

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violinists. For Lady Hurtmore, Venice meant something rather different. It meant gambling at the Rudotto, masked balls, gay supper parties — all the delights of the most amusing city in the world. Living their separate lives, both might have been happy here in Venice almost indefinitely.

"But one day Lord Hurtmore had the disastrous idea of having his wife's portrait painted. Young Giangolini was recommended to him as the promising, the coming painter. Lady Hurtmore began her sittings. Giangolini was handsome and dashing, Giangolini was young. He had an amorous technique as perfect as his artistic technique. Lady Hurtmore would have been more than human if she had been able to resist him. She was not more than human."

"None of us are, eh?" The Lord of the Manor dug his finger into Mr. Bigger's ribs and laughed.

Politely, Mr. Bigger joined in his mirth; when it had subsided, he went on. "In the end they decided to run away together across the border. They would live at Vienna — live on the Hurtmore family jewels, which the lady would be careful to pack in her suitcase. They were worth more than £20,000, the Hurtmore jewels; and in Vienna, under Maria Theresa, one could live handsomely on the interest of £20,000.

"The arrangements were easily made. Giangolini had a friend who did everything for them — got them passports under an assumed name, hired horses to be in waiting on the mainland, placed his gondola at their disposal. They decided to flee on the day of the last sitting. The day came. Lord Hurtmore, according to his usual custom, brought his wife to Giangolini's studio in a gondola, left her there, perched on the high-backed model's throne, and went off again to listen to Galuppi's concert at the Misericordia. It was the time of full carnival. Even in broad daylight people went about in masks. Lady Hurtmore wore one of black silk — you see her holding it, there, in the portrait. Her husband, though he was no reveler and disapproved of carnival junketings, preferred to conform to the grotesque fashion of his neighbors rather than attract attention to himself by not conforming. The long black cloak, the huge three-cornered black hat, the long-nosed mask of white paper were the ordinary attire of every Venetian gentleman in these carnival weeks. Lord Hurtmore did not care to be conspicuous; he wore the same.

"There must have been something richly absurd and incongruous in the spectacle of this grave and solemn-faced English milord dressed in the clown's uniform of a gay Venetian masker. 'Pantaloon in the clothes of Pulcinella,' was how the lovers described him to each other; the old dotard of the eternal comedy dressed up as the clown. Well, this morning, as I have said, Lord Hurtmore came as usual in his hired gondola, bringing his lady with him. And she in her

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turn was bringing under the folds of her capacious cloak a little leather box, wherein, snug on their silken bed, reposed the Hurtmore jewels. Seated in the dark little cabin of the gondola, they watch the churches, the richly fretted *palazzi*, the high mean houses, gliding past them. From under his Punch's mask Lord Hurtmore's voice speaks gravely, slowly:

"'The learned Father Martini,' he said, 'has promised to do me the honor of coming to dine with us tomorrow. I doubt if any man knows more of musical history than he. I will ask you to be at pains to do him special honor.'

"'You may be sure I will, my Lord.' She could hardly contain the laughing excitement that bubbled up within her. Tomorrow at dinner time she would be far away — over the frontier, beyond Gorizia, galloping along the Vienna road. Poor old Pantaloon! But no, she wasn't in the least sorry for him. After all, he had his music, he had his odds and ends of broken marble. Under her cloak she clutched the jewel case more tightly. How intoxicatingly amusing her secret was!"

Mr. Bigger clasped his hands and pressed them dramatically over his heart. He was enjoying himself. He turned his long foxy nose toward the Lord of the Manor and smiled benevolently. The Lord of the Manor for his part was all attention.

"Well?" he inquired.

Mr. Bigger unclasped his hands and let them fall on to his knees.

"Well," he said, "the gondola draws up at Giangolini's door, Lord Hurtmore helps his wife out, leads her up to the painter's great room on the first floor, commits her into his charge with his usual polite formula, and then goes off to hear Galuppi's morning concert at the Misericordia. The lovers have a good two hours to make their final preparations.

"Old Pantaloon safely out of sight, up pops the painter's useful friend, masked and cloaked like everyone else in the streets and on the canals of this carnival Venice. There follow embracements and hand shakings and laughter all round; everything has been so marvelously successful, not a suspicion roused. From under Lady Hurtmore's cloak comes the jewel case. She opens it and there are loud Italian exclamations of astonishment and admiration. The pearls, the great Hurtmore emeralds, the ruby clasps, the diamond earrings — all these bright glittering things are lovingly examined, knowingly handled. Fifty thousand sequins at the least is the estimate of the useful friend. The two lovers throw themselves ecstatically into each other's arms.

"The useful friend interrupts them; there are still a few last things to be done. They must go and sign for their passports at the ministry of police. Oh, a mere formality; but still it has to be done. He will go out at the same time and sell one of the lady's diamonds to provide the necessary funds for the journey."

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Mr. Bigger paused to light a cigarette. He blew a cloud of smoke, and went on.

"So they set out, in their masks and capes, the useful friend in one direction, the painter and his mistress in another. Ah, love in Venice!" Mr. Bigger turned up his eyes in ecstasy. "Have you ever been in Venice and in love, sir?" he inquired of the Lord of the Manor.

"Never farther than Dieppe," said the Lord of the Manor, shaking his head.

"Ah, then you've missed one of life's great experiences. You can never fully and completely understand what must have been the sensations of little Lady Hurtmore and the artist, as they glided down the long canals, gazing at each other through the eyeholes of their masks. Sometimes, perhaps, they kissed — though it would have been difficult to do that without unmasking, and there was always the danger that someone might have recognized their naked faces through the windows of their little cabin. No, on the whole," Mr. Bigger concluded reflectively, "I expect they confined themselves to looking at each other. But in Venice, drowsing along the canals, one can almost be satisfied with looking — just looking." He caressed the air with his hand and let his voice drop away into silence. He took two or three puffs at his cigarette without saying anything. When he went on, his voice was very quiet and even.

"About half an hour after they had gone, a gondola drew up at Giangolini's door, and a man in a paper mask, wrapped in a black cloak and wearing on his head the inevitable three-cornered hat got out and went upstairs to the painter's room. It was empty. The portrait smiled sweetly and a little fatuously from the easel. But no painter stood before it and the model's throne was untenanted. The long-nosed mask looked about the room with an expressionless curiosity. The wandering glance came to rest at last on the jewel case that stood where the lovers had carelessly left it, open on the table. Deep-set and darkly shadowed behind the grotesque mask, the eyes dwelt long and fixedly on this object. Long-nosed Pulcinella seemed to be meditating.

"A few minutes later there was the sound of footsteps on the stairs, of two voices laughing together. The masker turned away to look out of the window. Behind him the door opened noisily; drunk with gay, laughable irresponsibility, the lovers burst in.

" '*Aha, caro amico.* Back already. What luck with the diamond?'

"The cloaked figure at the window did not stir; Giangolini rattled gaily on. There had been no trouble whatever about the signatures, no questions asked; he had the passports in his pockets. They could start at once.

"Lady Hurtmore suddenly began to laugh uncontrollably; she couldn't stop.

" 'What's the matter?' asked Giangolini, laughing, too.

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"'I was thinking,' she gasped between the paroxysms of her mirth, 'I was thinking of old Pantaloon sitting at the Misericordia, solemn as an owl, listening —' she almost choked, and the words came out shrill and forced as though she were speaking through tears — 'listening to old Galuppi's boring old cantatas.'

"The man at the window turned round. 'Unfortunately, Madam,' he said, 'the learned maestro was indisposed this morning. There was no concert.' He took off his mask. 'And so I took the liberty of returning earlier than usual.' The long, gray, unsmiling face of Lord Hurtmore confronted them.

"The lovers stared at him for a moment speechlessly. Lady Hurtmore put her hand to her heart; it had given a fearful jump and she felt a horrible sensation in the pit of her stomach. Poor Giangolini had gone as white as his paper mask. Even in these days of *cicisbei*, of official gentleman friends, there were cases on record of outraged and jealous husbands resorting to homicide. He was unarmed, but goodness only knew what weapons of destruction were concealed under that enigmatic black cloak. But Lord Hurtmore did nothing brutal or undignified. Gravely and calmly, as he did everything, he walked over to the table, picked up the jewel case, closed it with the greatest care and saying: 'My box, I think,' put it in his pocket and walked out of the room. The lovers were left looking questioningly at each other."

There was a silence.

"What happened then?" asked the Lord of the Manor.

"The anticlimax," Mr. Bigger replied, shaking his head mournfully. "Giangolini had bargained to elope with fifty thousand sequins. Lady Hurtmore didn't, on reflection, much relish the idea of love in a cottage. Woman's place, she decided at last, is in the home — with the family jewels. But would Lord Hurtmore see the matter in precisely the same light? That was the question, the alarming, disquieting question. She decided to go and see for herself.

"She got back just in time for dinner. 'His Illustrissimous Excellency is waiting in the dining-room,' said the majordomo. The tall doors were flung open before her; she swam in majestically, chin held high — but with what a terror in her soul! Her husband was standing by the fireplace. He advanced to meet her.

"'I was expecting you, Madam,' he said and led her to her place.

"That was the only reference he ever made to the incident. In the afternoon he sent a servant to fetch the portrait from the painter's studio. It formed part of their baggage when, a month later, they set out for England. The story has been passed down with the picture from one generation to the next. I had it from an old friend of the family when I bought the portrait last year."

Mr. Bigger threw his cigarette end into the grate. He flattered himself that he had told that tale very well.

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"Very interesting," said the Lord of the Manor, "very interesting indeed. Quite historical, isn't it? One could hardly do better with Nell Gwynn or Anne Boleyn, could one?"

Mr. Bigger smiled vaguely, distantly. He was thinking of Venice — the Russian countess staying in his *pension*, the tufted tree in the courtyard outside his bedroom, that strong hot scent she used (it made you catch your breath when you first smelled it), and there was the bathing on the Lido and the gondola and the dome of the Salute against the hazy sky, looking just as it looked when Guardi painted it. How enormously long ago and far away it all seemed now! He was hardly more than a boy then; it had been his first great adventure. He woke up with a start from his reverie.

The Lord of the Manor was speaking. "How much now would you want for that picture?" he asked. His tone was detached, offhand; he was a rare one for bargaining.

"Well," said Mr. Bigger, quitting with reluctance the Russian countess, the paradisal Venice of five-and-twenty years ago. "I've asked as much as 1000 for less important works than this. But I don't mind letting this go for 750."

The Lord of the Manor whistled. "Seven-fifty," he repeated. "It's too much."

"But my dear sir," Mr. Bigger protested, "think what you'd have to pay for a Rembrandt of this size and quality — 20,000 at least. Seven hundred and fifty isn't at all too much. On the contrary, it's very little considering the importance of the picture you're getting. You have a good enough judgment to see that this is a very fine work of art."

"Oh, I'm not denying that," said the Lord of the Manor. "All I say is that 750's a lot of money. Whe-ew! I'm glad my daughter does sketching. Think if I'd had to furnish the bedrooms with pictures at 750 a time!" He laughed.

Mr. Bigger smiled. "You must also remember," he said, "that you're making a very good investment. Late Venetians are going up. If I had any capital to spare —" The door opened and Miss Pratt's blonde and frizzy head popped in.

"Mr. Crowley wants to know if he can see you, Mr. Bigger."

Mr. Bigger frowned. "Tell him to wait," he said irritably. He coughed and turned back to the Lord of the Manor. "If I had any capital to spare, I'd put it all into late Venetians. Every penny."

He wondered, as he said the words, how often he had told people that he'd put all his capital, if he had any, into primitives, cubism, Negro sculpture, Japanese prints. . . .

In the end the Lord of the Manor wrote him a check for 680.

"You might let me have a typewritten copy of the story," he said, as he put on his hat. "It would be a good tale to tell one's guests at dinner, don't you think? I'd like to have the details quite correct."

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"Oh, of course, of course," said Mr. Bigger, "the details are most important."

He ushered the little round man to the door. Good morning. Good morning. He was gone. A tall pale youth with side whiskers appeared in the doorway. His eyes were dark and melancholy; his expression, his general appearance were romantic and at the same time a little pitiable. It was young Crowley, the painter.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," said Mr. Bigger. "What did you want to see me for?"

Mr. Crowley looked embarrassed, he hesitated. How he hated having to do this sort of thing! "The fact is," he said at last, "I'm horribly short of money. I wondered if perhaps you wouldn't mind . . . if it would be convenient to you . . . to pay me for that thing I did for you the other day. I'm awfully sorry to bother you."

"Not at all, my dear fellow." Mr. Bigger felt sorry for this wretched creature who didn't know how to look after himself. Poor young Crowley was as helpless as a baby. "How much did we settle it was to be?"

"Twenty pounds, I think it was," said Mr. Crowley timidly.

Mr. Bigger took out his pocketbook. "We'll make it twenty-five."

"Oh, no, really . . . I couldn't. Thanks very much." Mr. Crowley blushed like a girl. "I suppose you wouldn't like to have a show of some of my landscapes, would you?" he asked, emboldened by Mr. Bigger's air of benevolence.

"No, no. Nothing of your own." Mr. Bigger shook his head inexorably. "There's no money in modern stuff. But I'll take any number of those sham Old Masters of yours." He drummed with his fingers on Lady Hurtmore's sleekly painted shoulder. "Try another Venetian," he added. "This one was a great success."

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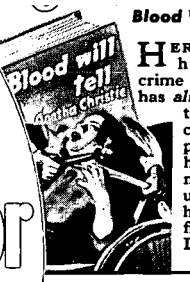

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